

ARGOSY



ALL-STORY WEEKLY

MARCH
16

PRICE
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15¢

War in the Cattle Country!

The Saga of Silver Bend

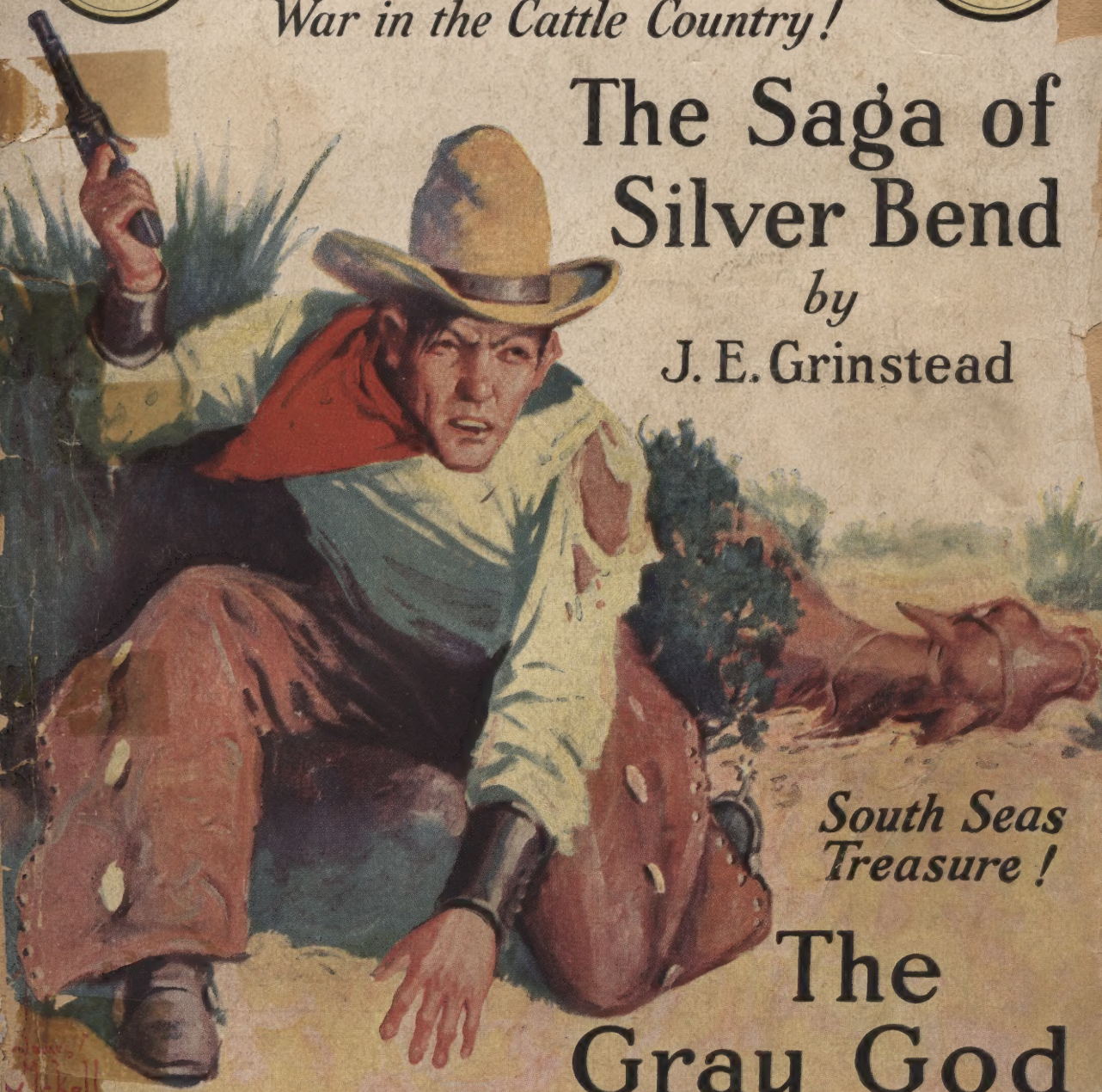
by

J. E. Grinstead

*South Seas
Treasure!*

The Gray God

by Allan Dunn



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Look Yourself Over!

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I Can Give It To You in 30 Days

In 30 days I can do you over so that she will hardly know you. I'll put a whole inch of solid muscle on each arm in 30 days, and two whole inches of rippling strength across your chest. I've done it for over a hundred thousand others, and I can do it for you. I don't care how weak and puny you are. I like to get them weak and puny, because it's the hopeless cases that I work with best. It gives me a lot of real joy just to see them develop and the surprised look in their eyes when they step before the mirror at the end of 30 days and see what a miracle I have worked for them.

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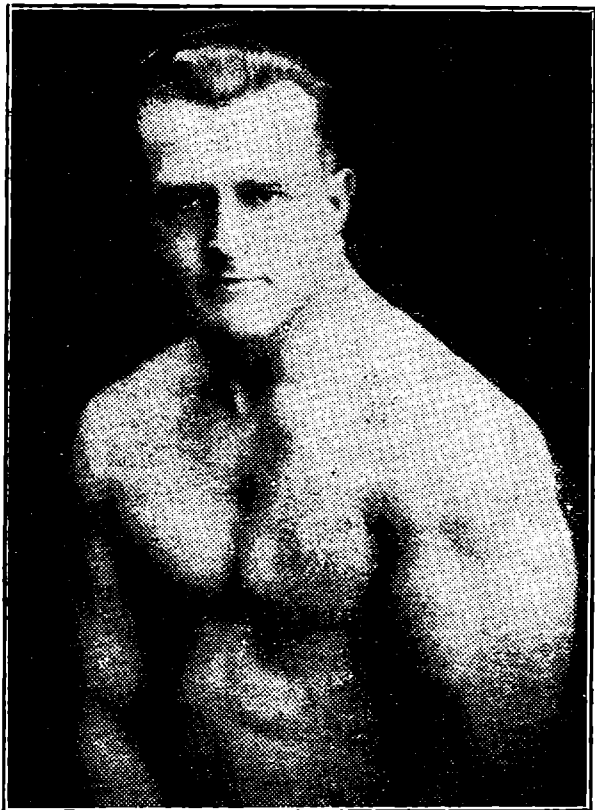
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ARGOSY



ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 202

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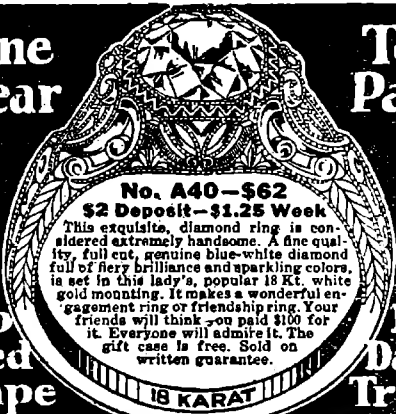
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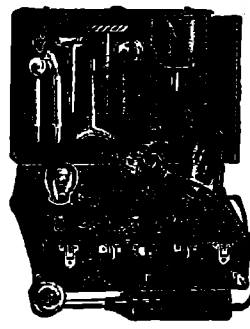
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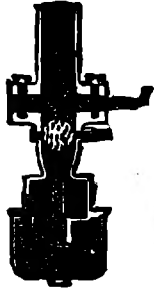
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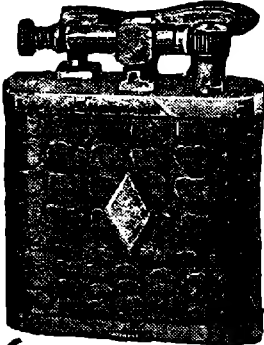
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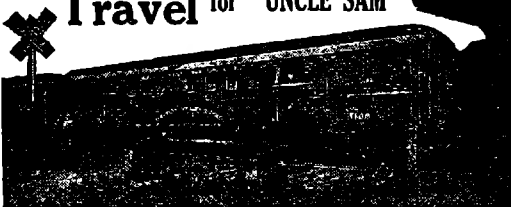
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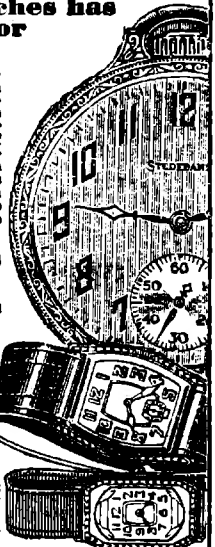
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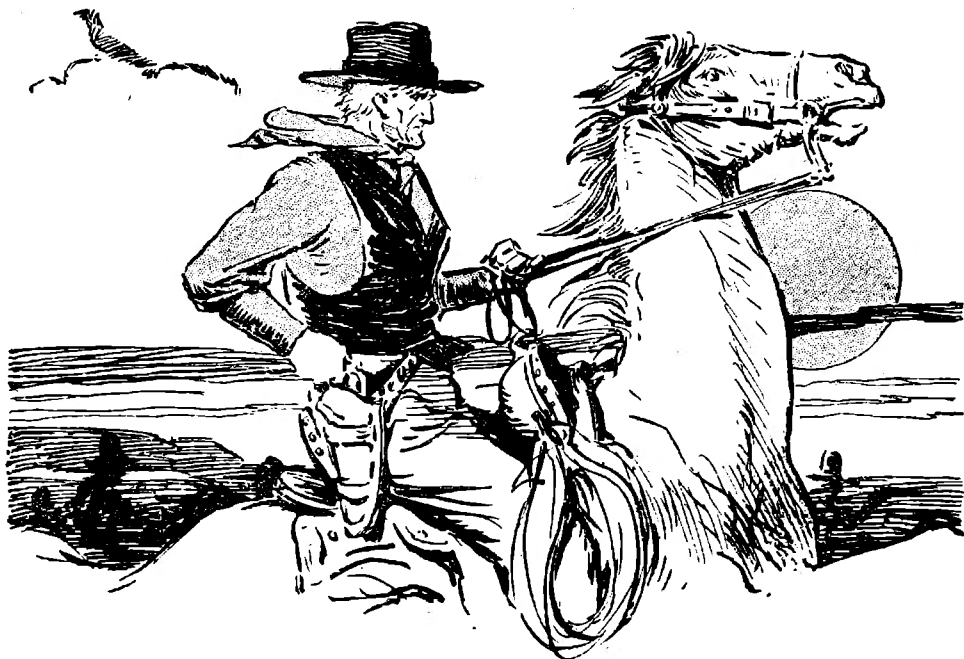
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Old Railroad's gun flashed in the sun as he jerked it from the holster

The Saga of Silver Bend

Randy Ross didn't dare face the sight of death—but when war broke loose upon the Railroad Ranch, death was too frequent to dodge

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "Signed," "Scada," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MESS IN THE BOTTLE.

TWO riders were hazing a little band of cattle northward on a prairie trail. Half a mile ahead of them the trail dropped over the rimrock into a broad, hazy valley. That valley was known as Silver Bend.

One of the riders was a round-faced little chap, whose high heels helped him to be five feet four. His eyes were the wide, innocent blue eyes of a baby. He might have been twenty or he might have been thirty; his age didn't show. His auburn hair was inclined to curl, and therefore he was called Dolly. He had another name, but no-

body in the cow country knew or cared what it was.

The other man was long and lank, flat of cheek, with a pair of cold, keen gray eyes that peered from under bony brows. Eyes that saw things and were thoughtful.

Never were two men less alike, physically and characteristically, than these two. Yet, gaunt, saturnine, thoughtful Old Sankey and the capricious Dolly were side-partners. As he circled a yearling, and drifted back to the side of Sank, Dolly broke into the song of Railroad Ranch:

"Hobble the left foot, turn loose the right,
That's about as long as we ever stop at night,

Workin' on the Railroad,
Mighty little pay,
Workin' on the Railroad,
Eatin' prairie hay.

"Unroll your blankets and spread 'em
on the ground,
Can't get asleep before the boss comes round.

Workin' on the Railroad, up at break of day,
Workin' on the Railroad for mighty little pay."

"Shut up, Dolly," growled Old Sank. "You make my head ache, and, besides that, this ain't no time for singing fool songs."

"How come it ain't?"

"You ask how come? Don't you know we're riding right into the roughest mess since the soap boiled over?"

"What mess?"

"Why, a lot of them killers acrost the river sent word they'd be over to cut the herd, when the Railroad held its home round-up. They ain't huntin' cattle, they're hunting trouble, and they're goin' to find some."

"Uh-huh! Yes, sir, boss! If they jump Old Railroad Ross, they'll be smoke."

The partners drew rein just where the high point of prairie broke over the rimrock into the valley. To right

and left they could see the river, almost beneath them, where only a narrow ridge kept the stream from cutting across.

Silver Bend, so called from the silvery cottonwoods that marked the course of the river, lay before them like a map. A great loop, six miles deep and four miles wide at the widest point, with its neck less than a mile across. In the middle distance lay the Railroad Ranch house and pens.

"LOOKS like a dang bottle, don't it, Sank?" said Dolly, musingly.

"It is a bottle, son, and it's got a mess in it that ain't fitten for humans. It's goin' to get shook, and some of the mess is goin' to be took, today. Any minute."

"Huh! It ain't happened yet," and Dolly pointed to a cloud of dust that rose, half a mile west of the ranch, in an open prairie valley. "They're still cuttin' 'em."

"It'll happen, all right."

"Then come on. We don't want to miss the party, if there's goin' to be one."

"No, I reckon not, but if you had been to as many parties like that as I have, you wouldn't be in such a rush."

"I been to some. What makes you figure on a mess in Silver Bend, anyway?"

"Seen it coming. Recollect I been workin' on the Railroad ten year. You ain't been here but a year, and they's plenty you don't know. Mostly, you've 'hobbled the left foot and turned loose the right.' Not sleeping at night, you been asleep in the daytime. This mess has been brewing for a long time, and now it's about ripe to boil over."

"Well, let her boil. What of it?"

"Plenty. If it was just a ruckus between the Railroad and that Holder-ness gang across the river it wouldn't be so bad, but if it starts it drags in the Bend and the whole country adjacent. Old Railroad Ross and his

three boys are apt to be the center of it, but it'll spread. Railroad will spread it, if it starts."

"I see. Them's the kind of happy settlement I've busted into. I been here a year and ain't heard a gun, except some fellow shootin' at a hawk or a coyote, and now—"

"And now you're apt to hear two guns—or more. But come on. Let's drift 'em on down there."

Down the steep hill and into the timber, they followed the band of cattle. Asa Ross, the eldest of the three Ross boys, and acting foreman, had sent Sank and Dolly out onto the big prairie early that morning to get this bunch off the head of Elm Branch. Old Sankey didn't mention it, but he and Asa Ross had been pretty close, and he suspected Asa had sent him away to keep him out of trouble. They had found the cattle without difficulty and were bringing them in at mid afternoon, instead of at nightfall, as Asa probably expected them to do.

At the edge of the prairie valley the cattle they were driving scented the big round-up herd and scampered on toward it. The partners drew rein at the edge of the prairie. A familiar scene lay before them. The "cutting" was in progress. No rodeo stuff. Just hard-working, skillful riders, on highly trained horses, cutting cattle from an immense herd, while other riders held the herd in place. Everybody who was ever in the cow country has seen a round-up, but this one in Silver Bend was loaded.

On the side of the herd toward them, Sank and Dolly could see a knot of men sitting quietly on their horses, watching the work. They could make out Old Railroad Ross, sitting his horse straight as an Indian, despite his three-score-and-odd years. Suddenly, above the din of bawling cattle, they heard the flat, echoless report of a gun. They saw Old Railroad's gun flash in the sun, as he jerked it from the holster. They saw his horse lunge as the

spurs went in, and then they heard a medley of shots, yells, and tramping hoofs.

"Come on!" snapped Sankey, fairly lifting his mouth with his spurs, and darted toward the battle, with Dolly crowding him for the lead.

THEY were too late to see the fight. Such battles are not of long duration. They were not too late to see some of the results of this one, but it would be a long time before all the results were seen.

A few neutrals were trying to hold the big herd and keep it from breaking into a stampede. A small party of men were riding hard for the timber at the north side of the prairie, firing backward as they rode. A dozen riders were in pursuit, pouring volley after volley at the fugitives. Just at the edge of the timber, one of the fugitives threw up his hands and pitched from the saddle.

The pursuers stopped. They were fighters, but canny fighters. They were not going to crowd that gang, when the others were behind trees. They turned back toward the round-up ground and reached it just as Sankey and Dolly did. They were led by Old Railroad Ross himself. He dismounted and stooped over the man who lay on the ground near the herd. It was Asa Ross.

The other men stood back in silence, as the old ranchman's jaws set and quivered with emotion. Asa was dead. A fair-haired, pleasant-faced man of around thirty stepped out of the group and went to Old Railroad's side. This was Peyton Ross, next younger than Asa. There were tears on his cheeks, and he couldn't speak for sobs. The iron had never entered Pate Ross's soul. He couldn't stand rough stuff. Railroad looked at him with a glance of almost contempt, then, ignoring this living son, he turned to the other men and said:

"Get a wagon around here, -fel-

lows. Load Asa in and take him to the house. I'll ride on and tell mother."

Ross caught his horse and mounted, then stopped and looked over the men, as if he were counting them.

"Where's Randy, Leck?" he inquired of the leathery old puncher, who stood near.

"I don't know, sir," replied Leck. "He was with the bunch that went after them fellows, and he ain't come back."

"Sank, you and Dolly go find Randy, and bring him home," and Railroad Ross rode grimly away toward his house. He was bereaved of the son upon whom he meant to shift the load in his declining years. Now he was framing what he would say to his good wife, when he reached that rambling old house in the edge of the timber.

Sankey called Old Leck aside and said:

"Leck, you heard what the old man told me to do. The fight was over when we got here. Tell me how it happened, and where I'm apt to find Randy."

"Ain't much to tell about the fight. It come up like most of 'em do, only this one was planned to make it cold murder. Early this morning Bell Holderness and his two brothers, Sam and Steve, comes across to the round-up. With 'em is two fellows I don't know. Some of the gang that hangs out at the Holderness ranch, I reckon. The other man with 'em was Ben Tarleton, and—"

"Ben Tarleton! Are you sure of that?"

"'Course I'm sure. Knowed him all his life. You knew Ben had sorty gone to the wild bunch, didn't you?"

"I knew the grand jury was after him for some of his devilment, but nothin' serious."

"Huh! That's the way they all start. Anyway, six of 'em had been here all day. At noon they et at the chuck wagon, and Old Railroad treated

'em just like he did the rest. A little while ago the six of 'em got together and rode around to the north side of the herd. I thought they was fixing to leave, and was glad of it. But they stopped in a bunch and sat watching Charlie Stone cut, on that little brown bronc of hisn. I reckon everybody was watchin' Charlie except me. I saw Asa Ross go round a steer and turn it back to the herd. As Asa trotted back toward the herd he passed close to the Holderness outfit. I was so far away that I couldn't hear anything that was said, but Asa stopped and the next second there was a shot. Asa never did draw."

"**H**UH! Cold killin's always start hell in the cow country," commented Sankey. "But what about Randy Ross? Where am I apt to find him?"

"You know where he is as well as I do. Where does he always go when trouble comes up, that he ain't got the nerve to face?"

"You mean— Why, Leck, he couldn't do that, at a time like this! The yellow, unprincipled whelp. Old Man Railroad just had one boy. The other two is women with britches on. Damn Randy's sorry soul, he—"

"Hush! Don't talk so loud. It won't do no good. Old Railroad lies to himself about Randy, and you got to lie to him, no matter what you find, nor where you find it. Better ride now. Better go north until you get out of sight in the woods."

Mounting his horse, Sankey rode north, with Dolly by his side. Neither of them spoke until they reached the edge of the timber, and then they stopped. On the ground lay a handsome, dark young man, dead. He was well clad in garments that had known the hand of an expert tailor. A handsome gold watch chain lay across his vest. His boots were of the finest make. The face was of patrician mold and told of good lineage.

"There's some more hell!" growled Sankey.

"I don't see anything but a dead man," returned Dolly. "I just seen another one back yonder. Looks like a hoss trade to me."

"Hoss trade, hell. Asa Ross was the best cowman, or any other sort of man that ever stretched a stirrup strap. Call it a trade to swap Asa for that carrion?"

"Well," drawled Dolly, "the Railroad might have give some boot. Maybe they throwed Randy Ross in for good measure. Looks like it."

"Damn Randy Ross! He ain't worth thinkin' about. Don't you know who this fellow is?"

"I shore don't. All I know about him is that he's ter'ble dead."

"No, I reckon you don't. He's been away from here the last year. Over in the Indian country, sorty on the dodge."

"I see. He didn't know much about dodgin' or else he didn't know much about Old Railroad Ross. Who is he? Tells me—he won't mind being introduced to a cowpuncher now, even if he has got a pearl-handled gun."

"That's Ben Tarleton."

"Huh! Sounds like something to make a summer dress out of, to me."

"Oh, you dang fool, you don't know anything about Silver Bend and the folks adjacent. Come on and let's find Randy and take him home, like the old man said."

A little way into the timber, Sank turned sharp to his left. They circled the west side of the open prairie, keeping in the timber until they were headed south, following a trail that led up the river.

"Wait a minute, Sank," called Dolly, and when Sankey stopped, "Where are you heading, anyway? If Randy chased them fellows and they got him, he'd be somewhere back toward the ford, on the west side of the Bend."

"Yes, he would, but he didn't. Randy's gone up the river to Willow

Mills to drown his troubles. Every time he stubs a toe or a dance gets called off on account of the weather, he's got to get drunk, so's he can stand it."

"Don't be too hard on Randy. He's just—"

"Too hard, nothing. How could I be too hard on a chap that would run away at a time like this? Poor Old Railroad didn't have but one boy. Pate's a good fellow, but he orto been a woman. Randy's just too hell-fired, awful dam' sorry to live. That's what he is. He ain't got as much nerve as—"

"Don't choke yo'self, Sank," drawled Dolly, while a hard, glinting light came into his baby blue eyes. "Let yo' tongue rest a minute. Yo're talking about me some, and it sorty scratches."

"About you! Why, dang yo' red-haired, fightin' fool soul, you'd rather eat smoke than flapjacks and honey. That's why I tied up with you."

"I KNOW, but—you're talkin' about me just the same. A fellow don't learn to face rough stuff until he has it pushed on him. When I was a kid I used to run off and hide when the family got ready to go to a funeral. I was afraid of dead people. I never got over it until my partner, out at a line-rider's cabin, got busted by a bad bronc. I had to pack him to the shack. I had to wait on him until he bled to death inside. I had to watch him die, and then I had to pack him on a bronc and take him to headquarters. It took that to cure me, and I'd have dodged it if I could. When I was Randy's age, I was just as bad as he is."

"Randy's age? How old are you?"

"Thirty-five, and I been through hell backward, forward, and sidewise. Randy Ross is a thoroughbred. He's got a heart in him as big as a house, and he's got plenty nerve, too. Old Railroad knows it. Charlie Stone forked a bad bronc the other day and rode it ragged. I was standing close

to Railroad and I heard him mutter: 'Just like Randy. A thoroughbred ain't worth a damn until it's busted.'"

"Yeah! That goes when they ain't been spoilt, but Randy's spoilt. Plumb ruined. He'll never get busted. Railroad has give him money, got him out'n his scrapes, and laughed at his devilment until nothing can't be did, now."

"Maybe not, but the best bronc I ever rode in my life was a busted outlaw. Men's like horses, they have to be busted. I reckon if you'd look back away, you'd see where they was some dust and the ground tore up when you got rode."

Old Sankey looked at Dolly with a puzzled expression in his gray eyes. This mess had shown him a new side of his little partner. He had known all along that Dolly had courage, but he had never suspected any depth to him. Dolly had touched a spot in the old puncher that nobody knew about. He, too, had "been rode." It had been a long time ago, but he could remember it.

"All right, Dolly, I'll let my tongue rest; but we got to get on after Randy. He's gone to Willow Mills. Leck seen him when he started. We'll find him drunk. We got to take him home, and we got to lie about where we found him, when we get there. Let's ride."

They rode on up the river trail through the big cottonwoods. As he led the way, Sankey was doing some real thinking and wondering if Dolly could be right. He didn't believe it.

CHAPTER II.

RANDY TAKES THE ACID TEST.

A MILE farther on the partners came to where the high point of prairie pushed in to form the stopper to the Silver Bend bottle. Here the river crowded close to the bluff, and the trail ran along the foot of the bluff and close to the high, red banks of the

river for a quarter of a mile, with the valley on the other side. Beyond that narrow pass, the bottom broadened again on their side, and formed the considerable community of plantations that supported the better business of the town of Willow Mills. Just before entering this narrow defile, Sankey stopped and said:

"There's two things I want to mention. One is that some time, when the river is high, two sticks of dynamite, one mule, and one bull-tongue plow is all it would take to turn the water across here, cut a new channel, and leave Silver Bend on the other side."

"All of which ain't got nothing to do with finding Randy and getting him back home as quick as possible."

"Maybe not, but here's something that has. A man in them seedling cottonwoods, just across the river, could pick us off easy as we go through that narrow place, and I ain't quite ready to be picked."

"They ain't had time to get up here and get set, but that 'll be a good thing to remember. Go ahead."

They rode on through the pass, watching the thicket of young cottonwoods on the other side of the stream. Sankey breathed a sigh of relief as they entered the big bottom above the bend. The river turned back west, and slightly north, here. The trail entered a wide lane that ran due west, two miles, to Willow Mills.

To the south of the lane, left of the riders, a number of farmhouses and broad fields could be seen. On their right, north of the lane, and about a mile from the town, stood a big, two-story white house, with green blinds and trimmings. There was no house near it. A few tenant houses stood well back along the river.

"I been seeing that house ever since I've been in this country," said Dolly, pointing ahead. "Who lives there?"

"Everything to the right of the lane, in this bottom, is the Tarleton plantation. The Tarletons have been here

ever since Texas has been Texas. Old Judge Tarleton's grandfather settled the place."

"Judge Tarleton? Anything to that young chap we saw layin' dead in the bushes back a ways?"

"Yes, right smart. Ben Tarleton was the youngest son of Judge Tarleton. That makes this big white house one of the corner posts of the three-cornered mess that starts in Silver Bend to-day, and won't stop until God knows when."

"Just farmers, ain't they?"

"No. They're planters. There's a difference. The people who live in the shacks and work the land are farmers. The old judge is a real, by gad, sir, Southern planter. The kind that reaches for his gun when he's insulted. He's apt as not to take the killin' of Ben as an insult. The judge is pretty old, but he's got two more boys, and any one of 'em would think it a disgrace to run from the devil if he had a red-hot pitchfork in his hand."

"Nice folks. You said this is a three-cornered mess. Where's the other corner? I might want to run the lines some time—or maybe dodge 'em."

"The other corner is one of the outposts of hell. It's the Holderness ranch, owned by Bell Holderness and his brothers. Steve Holderness married an Indian woman. That gives him a right to hold land in the Indian country. Bell Holderness, the oldest brother and a bachelor, furnishes the brains for the outfit, and everybody knows he owns the ranch in Steve's name. The reason they ain't pirates is because they ain't got a ship."

"Some more nice people. But look! Ain't that Randy Ross?"

THE sun was just setting behind the distant forest. At the mouth of a broad lane that ran back through an avenue of tall poplars to where the Tarleton home stood in its grove of locust trees, a man and a woman sat their horses, as if they had

merely met at that spot and stopped to pass the time of day.

That is exactly what had happened. Neither of them noticed the approach of the two riders. Suddenly, the man whirled his horse in the road and went thundering on toward Willow Mills. The woman put her hand to her brow, to shade her eyes against the glare of the setting sun, and stared after him.

Not until the two punchers were fairly abreast of her did she notice them. With a quick glance at her, as she turned her head, Dolly saw the same patrician feature that had marked the dead face of Ben Tarleton.

"Good evening, Miss Zella," said Sankey, sweeping his hat from his head.

"Oh, Mr. Sankey, I'm so glad it is you," returned Zella Tarleton. "Maybe you can do something with Randy. I—I don't know this gentleman with you, but—"

"You can say anything you like in his presence, ma'am. He'd forget to eat if a lady asked him to forget."

"I'm sure of that, or he wouldn't be with you. I know you haven't any patience with Randy, but he's good. He's just—he's just spoiled and irresponsible, generally, but now he seems to be demented."

"What seems to be the matter with him now?"

"I don't know. I met him here, and he didn't want to stop and talk to me. Something terrible has happened. He said he was going to kill Bell Holderness, and after that, he didn't care what happened. He said that half a dozen times. I begged him to go to the house, and tell me what was wrong, but he was almost insulting, and broke away while I was talking to him."

"That does sound like he was crazy," drawled Sank. "If he wouldn't listen to you he ain't apt to listen to me."

"I know, Mr. Sankey, but you must do something! Get to him before he— You know how he gets when he's in

trouble. Get him to go home. Make him go home. He wouldn't have a chance with Bell Holderness."

"Then I reckon we better ride," said Sank, shaking his bridle reins. "I'll do my best, Miss Zella."

"Now who dealt that lady a hand in the game?" asked Dolly when they were out of earshot.

"She deals 'em herself and deals 'em square," snapped Sank. "It's a damn shame for a woman like that to be crazy over a sorry cub like Randy Ross."

"Oh, I see. That brings on more talk. Why don't she marry him and reform him?"

"She's got too much sense to try a fool stunt like that. She's told him plenty of times that she'd marry him whenever he showed her that he could keep straight, and be a man. Every time she tells him that he goes and gets drunk to drown his sorrow."

"I see. Let's go to Willow Mills," and Dolly shot down the road like a flash, with Sank spurring hard to keep up with him.

Willow Mills was but a border village, with half a dozen stores, blacksmith shop, hotel, two saloons, and a dance hall. It was a combination farm center and cow-town, and like, all border towns, especially those on the line between Texas and Indian Territory, it was rough. As the partners rode into town they saw Randy dismount in front of the Cottonwood Saloon, and drop his bridle on the ground. They saw him pull his gun from the holster, spin the cylinder, put it back, and then disappear into the saloon.

"If he meets Bell Holderness in that shape, old Railroad Ross loses another boy," snapped Sank. "Come on, let's get him before he gets to drinking."

THEY stepped to the door and looked in. There was no one in the place but Randy and the bartender. Randy Ross was standing in the full light of the big hanging lamp.

He was a picture of physical beauty for a man. Full six feet, broad of shoulder, and tapering to the waist. His head was finely modeled, and his features good. He was as well clad as Ben Tarleton had been, and after much the same fashion. His physical strength was such that he showed no more than his twenty-five years, in spite of his dissipation.

"Ain't it a damn shame for a man like that to be yellow?" muttered Sanky.

"He ain't yellow, or he wouldn't be here," replied Dolly. "Come on. Let's get him out of there."

"You get him out. He's taken one drink, and the devil couldn't stop him."

Randy had taken one drink, set his glass on the bar, and was reaching for the bottle, when Dolly said, at his elbow:

"Wait a minute, Randy. I want to see you outside."

"Why, hello, Dolly! What are you doing here? Just in time to help me take a drink. Give us another glass, and—"

"No. Sometimes I drink and sometimes I don't."

"This is when I do," returned Randy, and filled his glass to the brim.

Dolly caught his arm, and he looked into those blue eyes, which had gone cold and dark.

"Set that glass down, Randy. If you take another drink right now, you'll curse yourself for it as long as you live. People are saying you are yellow. Let that alone. Come with me, and show 'em you ain't yellow."

Randy set the glass down and turned slowly away from the bar. His face had gone hard and set.

"Show me somebody that says I'm yel—" he began, and then stopped. "Dolly, I am yellow. Yellow as paint. I wish to God I wasn't!"

"No, you're not yellow. Come on outside. I want to talk to you."

For half an hour the two of them squatted in the deep shadow by the

blacksmith shop. Old Sankey kept them located by the red glow of their cigarettes, while he watched for the possible coming of Bell Holderness. Dolly talked as he had never talked in his life. At last he said:

"You can't whip anything by running from it. I know; I've tried it. Come on. Let's go back to the ranch. I'll stay with you and help you face it."

The three of them mounted and rode out of town. Preposterous as it might seem, Randy had never touched or looked upon a dead person. For several years there had been no occasion to see such things. Prior to that time he had simply run away from them, and today he had done the same thing.

Probably no other man in the Railroad outfit understood Randy's feeling in the matter, except little Dolly. Up to the time he saw Zella Tarleton, Dolly hadn't cared much what happened, but something in the girl's pleading tone had determined him to save Randy from himself. There was going to be trouble, and plenty of it, in Silver Bend, but Randy Ross had to face it like a man, for that girl. At the lane leading to the Tarleton place, Randy stopped.

"Let me go in here a minute, fellows," said Randy. "I'll come on and catch up with you."

He wasn't fooling Dolly. The little puncher knew what would happen. Randy would go back to town and try to drown his troubles. He cudgeled his brain, and finally:

"They might not want you in there, Randy. They might heard about Ben by this time, and—"

"BEN! What about Ben?"

"Didn't you know he was killed in that mess at the Railroad to-day?"

"Killed! My God, no!"

"Yes, he was killed. I saw him."

"Then I don't want to go in there. Let me go back to town."

"No," said Dolly, firmly. "We're

going back to the Railroad. That's the best place for all of us right now."

They rode on through the lane and struck the trail that ran through the narrows. Sank led the way, then came Randy, and Dolly brought up the rear. He was back there because he didn't mean to let Randy Ross turn and get away from him.

He knew that terrible thing that was gripping Randy's heart with icy fingers. It wasn't fear. It was a tangible thing, worse than fear. He himself had lain awake at night, gripped by it. It couldn't be tamed. It had to be killed, and only one thing could kill it. That was contact with the dead.

Just as they reached the narrows, two shots rang on the night, and a minute later two riderless horses came bounding along the trail toward them. They stopped the horses, and old Sank felt over the saddles in the darkness.

"One of 'em's Leck's and the other Pate's," he said.

"Well, let's get down the trail," said Dolly. "Whoever done it has run away, and maybe the boys are just shot up a little."

He knew better, but they pushed on, the two riderless horses trotting ahead of them, with bridles over the saddle horns. At the narrowest place, the lead horse snorted, shied, and the two of them whirled and came back to the riders.

"I'll—I'll hold the horses while you look," said Randy.

"No, come on," insisted Dolly. "The horses will stand."

Randy dismounted and staggered along the trail. Fifty yards farther on, they found Leck, stone dead. Twenty feet beyond him lay Peyton Ross.

"I'll—I'll get the horses," faltered Randy.

"No. Let Sank bring them."

They stood together, within a few feet of Leck's body, until the horses came. Dolly knew, only too well, what Randy was suffering. He recalled that night in a line-rider's cabin, with his

dead partner. This was the baptism of death for Randy. He'd either come out of it a brave man or a hopeless coward, according to the stuff that was in him.

"Hold the horse, Sank," commanded the little puncher. "You take his shoulders, Randy. You're stronger than me."

How Randolph Ross went through that ordeal he never knew. When Leck was lashed to his horse, they went on to Peyton Ross. As they lifted the body to its saddle, sobs were shaking Randy, but they were no longer sobs of fear and dread. He loved this gentle, kindly brother, as if he were a sister. He had always stood in awe of Asa, who was ten years his senior, and paid little attention to him.

Suddenly Randy laid his hand on his brother as he lay bound to the saddle, and in a husky tone that seemed the very tearing of his heartstrings, he said:

"Good-by, Pate. You'll go to God, if ever man did. I won't forget you, and I won't forget the men that done this." He was cold now, and when he spoke a moment later, his voice was hard and even. "Each one of you boys lead one of the horses. You won't have to watch me now, Dolly. I'll lead the way, so if those fellows are still in the brush, you'll get a warning."

"God! What a dose for a man to take," whispered Dolly to the silent old Sankey, as Randy mounted, and rode on down the trail. "He took it like a man, too. Don't tell me he's yellow!"

ALIGHT was burning in the house at the Railroad Ranch, while some of the men sat up with the dead, as was the custom of the country. A light also showed in the long bunk house.

There would be little sleeping that night. The men talked among themselves in low tones. Asa Ross, as foreman of the ranch, had been a hard driver, but fair, and the men liked him.

2 A

They wondered who would handle the men now.

For all of old Railroad's dash that day in the gun fight, they knew he was too old for the job. Peyton couldn't do it. He was too tender-hearted. He'd either give the ranch away, or somebody would take it away from him. There was no use to consider Randy. He was too young, and besides that, he was yellow, and a drinker. All these things the men talked over among themselves.

The evening was chilly, and old Railroad Ross sat by a little fire in the open fireplace. Asa's body was in another room. Railroad was alone with his grief. The grief of such men is not normal. They feel as deeply, perhaps, as other people, but their grief seems to benumb and harden them. Often such men are charged with looking upon death as merely a physical loss.

Ross had been disappointed in the matter of sons. He wanted a houseful of them; ten had been born to him. As one man put it, owing to rattle-snakes, round-up fights, and rough stuff, only three reached full manhood. Asa was now gone. Peyton was also gone, but the old fellow didn't know it as he sat staring, hard-eyed, at the fire, and trying to get his bearings in this storm that had overtaken him as he neared the last port on the seas of life.

Silver Bend, all of it, twelve thousand acres in extent, had been acquired by Ross in his early manhood. His real name was Randolph Ross. His brand was plain RR. He said he knew the brand could be run, but that a thief would take your stuff anyway, if you didn't watch it.

Waggish cowboys dubbed the place Railroad Ranch. From that it was but a step to calling the ranchman Railroad Ross. As the years passed he became so known all over the far-flung ranges. Even the banks thought that the initial in his signature, "R. Ross," stood for Railroad.

Railroad cattle and horses in thousands roamed the unfenced prairies to the southward, but Silver Bend was Railroad's home, and he loved it in the peculiar way that such men love their homes.

He was wondering now who would carry on, and keep it together, when he was gone. Of all his boys, Randy, the baby, named for his father and more like his sire in some ways than any of the others, had been the bitter disappointment. What would the spoiled, irresponsible Randy do with Silver Bend and the Railroad if it fell to him? The old man's musings were interrupted by low voices and shuffling steps at the side gate of the yard, heard through the open door.

He stepped out into the yard and called:

"What is it, boys?"

"Come out here, please, Mr. Ross," replied Sank, and then when he reached them the old puncher went on in low tones:

"It's Pate and Leck. We found 'em up at the narrows."

"Found 'em? What do you mean? Dead?"

"Yes, sir. I reckon somebody got the water light on 'em from across the river and just potted 'em."

"Potted Pate. Murdered him. He never done a thing to anybody in his life. Him and Leck was goin' to town to get a coffin for Asa and have a grave dug. Pate didn't even have a gun on him. And they just bushed him, cold."

The old man's voice was hard and hummed like a taut wire. He stopped and seemed to be trying to control himself before those strained wires broke. Presently he went on in a flat, lifeless tone:

"Take Pate in the room where Asa is and lay him out. Better take Leck to the bunk house, I reckon. He'd feel more at home there."

He turned away and took a few steps, and then turned back. "I sent

you after Randy, Sank. Did you find him?"

"Here I am, dad," said Randy, stepping forward from the group by the gate.

"Come on in the house. The other boys can attend to things out here."

He and his one remaining son went into the house together. What terrible thoughts of havoc and disaster were in the mind of old Railroad Ross at that moment none would ever know.

CHAPTER III.

THE VIGIL, AT RAILROAD RANCH.

RAILROAD and Randy sat down by the fire. The old man threw on a fresh stick of wood, filled his pipe, lit it, and smoked in silence. The clock ticked mournfully on the mantel. There was no sound about the house except an occasional low-spoken word, or a light step on tiptoes. The whole place seemed to be in silent mourning. It was so still in that room that a bit of falling ember in the fire could be heard.

At last Railroad spoke:

"Randy, it looks like the old Railroad is square up ag'in' its last fight, and mighty shorthanded for such a bad mess. Asa's gone, and I'm too old to carry on. I been wondering about you. I ain't never pulled the hackamore on you like I ought to, I reckon. I didn't have much fun when I was a boy. By the time you grew up I had right smart money, and I just turned you loose. You ain't never been rode none, Randy, and you've sorty gone bronc on me, but, Randy— Boy, I—I need a man right now."

Old Railroad choked and stopped. For the first time since he had stood over Asa as he lay on the ground, the old fellow broke and a tear glistened on his flat, hard cheek.

Followed minutes of silence. The clock ticked on. The two men, startlingly alike except in age, sat staring

into the fire, the red light on their bronze faces.

Finally Randy stirred in his chair, cleared his throat, and said:

"Dad, I'm—I'm going to try to be a man."

Railroad turned his head and stared at Randy, as if one of his dead sons had spoken to him, but said no word, and Randy went on:

"I've been a worthless, drunken pup, dad, and, worst of all, I've been yellow as paint."

"No! Not yellow!"

"Yes, dad, yellow. I'm coming clean. Sank and Dolly would lie to you about me, just as everybody else has done, but I'm going to tell you the truth. When I saw Asa dead I didn't have the nerve to face it. I ran away. I went to Willow Mills to get drunk and forget it, like the yellow pup I was. That's where they found me. Don't let them tell you anything else."

"Go on," commanded Railroad. "It's hard as hell to take, but give me the whole dose."

"The rest won't be so hard to take, dad. Little Dolly got me out of the Cottonwood some way. I think he must have done it with his eyes. Then he talked to me. He made me come home. He watched me, and when I tried to turn back and run away from it he wouldn't let me."

"God made a man when he made Dolly. If He'd made him any bigger, he'd be the biggest man in the world. It's bitter, but I can take it. Go on."

"When we found Leck and Pate I tried to run away again. Dolly made me help him put them on the horses. Dad, it wasn't live men I was afraid of. It was dead men and death itself. I never told you before, because I was ashamed of it. I'm telling you now because I'm cured of it."

"What!"

"Yes, cured. When I put my hand on Pate all the yellow went out of me. He never was afraid; he just didn't

want to hurt anybody. From that moment on I wasn't afraid of anything, and I never will be again. All I want now is a chance to prove it, and square things for the cold killing of Asa and Pate."

"Thank God!" said Railroad in a husky voice as he gripped the hand of his one remaining son. "You're giving me help when I need it. I didn't see how I was going to get by this, but I can now."

Randy rose and left the room. Railroad didn't know where he was going. Perhaps out to the bucket that hung on a hook on the long black gallery, to get a drink.

Randy went into the room where his two murdered brothers lay. He turned back the sheets and looked at them. No one in the room spoke a word. They stared at Randy and wondered. They noticed something that Randy himself had not noticed. His long Colt .45 was still in the holster at his belt.

Some of the grim old punchers took it as an omen, others looked upon it as they would have looked upon wearing a hat in the presence of the dead.

RANDY replaced the sheets gently, turned, and left the room. He had faced the dead without a quiver. He could face anything now. Returning, he sat down in the chair by his father.

"Dad, I don't know where nor how to begin, but I'm ready to try to be a man. Tell me what to do, and I'll do my best. I don't understand why we are in this trouble. I don't understand why the Holderness boys—"

"Just a minute, Randy. You would not understand it. It's old, old trouble that began when you was a baby. Twenty-four year ago this round-up time. Sam Holderness, the daddy of these Holderness boys, ranched in above Willow Mills. Sam was a blustering sort of fellow and didn't amount to much, but right self-important. At

the round-up that spring Sam and me had an argument over some brands.

"I don't know what anybody else said to Sam, or whether they egged him on. All I know is that along late in the afternoon Sam came at me, makin' smoke. I was right handy with a gun in them days; had to be. I shot Sam.

"The bullet went through his right lung and stopped him, but didn't kill him. He got up all right, but come winter he took pneumonia and died. I don't know whether that bullet hole in his lung had anything to do with it or not. Some of the doctors said it did, and others said it didn't; but no matter. There was plenty of busybodies to say that I killed Sam Holderness.

"I felt bad about it, of course. Sam didn't have anything much, and he had left a widow and three little boys. Bell was about ten year old then. A quiet, say-nothing boy. The youngest one wasn't more than a baby. I went to the administrator of Sam's estate and put ten thousand dollars where he could draw on it for the widow and children, without anybody knowing where it come from."

"They made out all right. The boys grew up. Sam's widow married and went away from this country; but the boys stayed. They worked with cattle. I knew 'em all, and they seemed to treat me same as anybody else.

"Then two, three year ago Steve Holderness married into the Chickasaw tribe, across the river. Bell had got some money together, trading here and yonder, and they started the Holderness ranch. I thought the old trouble was all forgot, but one day Steve got drunk at Willow Mills and give it out that I was goin' to pay for killin' his daddy.

"There was right smart talk about it here and yonder, but it died down. Then this thing broke to-day, right out of a clear sky. Ain't no doubt but what Bell Holderness has kept this in his gizzard all these years. If they'd

killed me, it wouldn't look so bad, but seems like they aim to get my boys one at a time and leave me to suffer out my old age. I thought the country had got civilized some, and we had got away from them old wars, but I was wrong."

"I never heard of that before, dad. I could understand the Holderness boys wanting to meet you and shoot it out, if they thought you killed their father. But this cold killing and bush-whacking of innocent men don't go."

"No, it oughtn't to go; but it looks like they're makin' it go. I understand the Holderness boys are rough. I've never been to their ranch, but I understand it's a sort of hangout for a hard gang of fellows that's dodging the law. That reminds me of Ben Tarleton. What in the kingdom ever made a boy, raised like Ben was, take up with fellows like them?"

"That's the bitterest part of it all, Ben getting killed at our round-up the way he did."

"Well, he was with them fellows. They killed Asa, and one of them got killed. It just happened to be Ben."

"I know, dad, but—you know about Zella and me. She's the only thing that has kept me from going plumb to the devil and being as bad as Ben was."

"Huh! Maybe so, but I got an idea it's partly what's inside of you. I knew you and Zella were sweethearts, and I supposed you'd marry as soon as you got yo' crop of wild oats harvested, but now—"

"Now!" Randy almost gasped. "You wouldn't object to me marrying Zella, because of this?"

"Oh, no. I ain't got a thing ag'in' Zella. She's one of the finest young women in Texas. Trouble is, old Judge Tarleton and them other two boys of hisn, Lav and Cliff, are pretty apt to object some. You look at it from yo' relation to Zella, and it looks bad enough. Look at it from the viewpoint of having the Tarletons join the Hol-

derness gang ag'in' us, and it looks a lot worse."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"YOU better think of it if you're goin' to try to work out of this mess alive. It'll be plain enough that Ben was shot in the back. You couldn't convince the old judge and his boys that ary Tarleton that ever lived would turn his back to an enemy. That leaves it just plain assassination in their minds. Besides that, Ben had not fired a shot. Every chamber of that pearl-handled gun was full."

"Do they know all that?"

"I reckon they do, by this time. Dave Simms was here with the D Bar outfit. They put Ben in their chuck wagon and took him over the prairie road and around that way. Judge Tarleton and the boys may see sense, knowing as they do how Ben's run wild lately. The chances are, though, that they'll go clean crazy. They're good folks, but they can't believe a Tarleton is ever wrong."

"They're the kind that can be awful hard, when they are hard," said Randy, musingly.

"Yes, and they're apt to be hard now. They's one thing. Whatever they do will be done in the open. They won't pot nobody from the bushes. Old Judge Tarleton is likely to just straddle a horse and come storming right over here."

"Dad, it's going to be hard for me," sighed Randy. "If I'd been a man all along, I'd know how to act, but now—"

"Them's things a fellow has to learn by himself. 'Bout all I can tell you is to keep yo' head cool. It don't take a very brave man to kill somebody. It takes a lot braver one to not kill when he's crowded and has a chance to kill. We can handle the Holderness gang if the Tarletons stay out of it. If they don't? Well, let's not cross any bridges before they're built." Lighting his pipe, old Railroad smoked

in silence, while Randy pondered his situation.

The following day was a day of funerals at Willow Mills. Members of two of the most prominent families on that part of the border were buried in the same cemetery. The people of the community were in attendance, but the wise ones were tight-lipped. The trouble between Railroad Ross and Sam Holderness was recalled by old men, and they wagged their heads over it.

Few knew any of the facts about the killing of Asa Ross and Ben Tarleton at the Railroad round-up. Randy Ross, Dolly and Sank, and old Railroad knew of the bushwhacking of Pate and Leck, but they had told nothing.

The cortege that came in from the Railroad ranch was ominous. A wagon brought three caskets. Ahead of the wagon rode ten armed men, with Randy Ross in the leading pair, and Dolly by his side. Behind the wagon came the family carriage and a few other vehicles, followed by ten more armed men.

There was pretty likely to be peace until the funeral was over, or a lot more graves would be needed. The procession filed through the wide gate and stopped. At the grave the armed punchers stood about in groups, bare-headed but vigilant.

The Tarleton funeral had entered the gate a few minutes ahead of them. The graves were less than a hundred feet apart. With bowed gray heads, Railroad Ross and the venerable Judge Tarleton stood with their backs to each other, listening to the last rites of their sons.

Randy, outwardly cold but inwardly torn with emotion, stood by his mother's chair. He quivered as his ear caught a few words of what the minister was saying at Ben Tarleton's grave. Among them were, "stricken down in the bloom of youth by an assassin's bullet." That told him how the Tarletons had taken Ben's death, and

what he might expect from them in his hour of trouble.

He glanced toward that other funeral, and saw Zella sobbing in the arms of a neighboring woman, and his heart almost broke, because he could not even offer a word of comfort to this woman, who he had loved from his boyhood and who needed him now as he needed her.

THERE was no disturbance at the cemetery. Randy had expected none; but on the return to the ranch every bend of the road, every thicket by the way, was a potential ambush.

He was head of the Railroad outfit now. Old Railroad Ross and his wife got into their carriage when the funeral was over, and waited deferentially for the Tarleton carriage to pass out ahead of them. In it were the judge and his wife, Zella and her two brothers.

There was little show of emotion. Railroad and his wife were silent because they had seen so much sorrow and knew the futility of violent grief. The Tarletons were silent, because violent emotion was unbecoming their patrician blood and lineage. No one in the Tarleton carriage looked toward the Ross equipage.

Passing out the gate, the Tarletons went on toward the white house in the locust grove, followed by no one. Outside the gate, the Railroad outfit formed again, as it had come, and followed at a respectful distance. Two old men stood at the cemetery gate talking, as the crowd broke up and left.

"I never noticed Randy Ross look-in' so much like his daddy before," said one.

"Looks just like Railroad did twenty or thirty year ago," replied the other, "but he won't never be the man his daddy is, if he lives—and he won't."

"Say he won't? Why?"

"I picked up a smatterin' of how

this mess comes up. The real quarrel is with the Holderness boys, over the killin' of old Sam years ago. Worst thing Randy's up ag'in', though, is the Tarleton boys. They ain't afraid and they mean business."

"Well, it ain't my quarrel. The less outsiders say about a mess like this, the less they're likely to have to swallow."

"That's right. I wouldn't mention it, except to a fellow like you. It's their quarrel. Hands off and let 'em settle it, I say."

In those few words the sentiment of the better element of the community was expressed, and they would studiously refrain from talking; but there were plenty of irresponsible people who would take sides and let their tongues wag.

Nothing befell the Railroad outfit on the return trip to the ranch. Things were set as nearly to rights as they could be after such a catastrophe. The men went about the late evening ranch work, getting ready for the next day's handling of stock, branding, and the like. Old Railroad and Randy kept to the house. Sank and Dolly went out to round up the remuda.

DOLLY," said Sankey, "I got an idea that you've elected yo'self to a right dangerous place."

"Anybody that sticks to the old Railroad now is in a dangerous place, and anybody that quits it is a yeller-bellied hound."

"That may be true, and I reckon it is; but I don't aim to quit, so you ain't hurt my feelings none. Point is, Randy Ross aims to ride, and ride hell-bent for trouble. The Railroad riders will have to go in pairs or better, and somebody's got to ride with Randy. After what happened last night, he's apt to take you."

"Well, I'd hate to leave you, but if he calls me, I'll have to ante."

"Yes, I know you will. Trouble is, whoever rides with Randy is due

for about what Leck got for riding with Pate. That Holderness gang aims to clean up on the Railroad and do it quick."

"Looks like it, but unless I miss my measure of Randy, he'll be at the cleaning."

"With the Holderness gang, yes. With the Tarletons, he can't turn a hand."

"Why can't he?"

"Account of Zella."

"Huh! You may see it that way, but I don't. I can see how a man could love that girl to death, but I can't see why he should stand still and let her folks shoot him to shoestrings on account of it, and I don't believe Randy can. Anyway, I ain't in love with her, and if I happen to be between them and Randy, or can get between 'em—"

"Steady! Wait till it happens, to talk about it, and then don't talk. Whatever way things jump, you and me will work together, and we'll find plenty to do before this thing is over. I'm just a pore old puncher, and Randy Ross is the only heir to the Railroad and about a million bronchos and cattle, and has got a fighting chance for the finest girl in Texas, but I wouldn't trade places with him for a whole lot to boot."

The Railroad was quiet enough that night. The men were catching up with their sleep. No one was likely to attack the place, when thirty hard riders and straight shooters were known to be there. But Randy's troubles were not far off.

Came morning, and true to Sankey's prediction, Randy called Dolly to ride with him, but he arranged for Sankey and another trusted old puncher, Con Bates, to be always on the same part of the range with them. They had just saddled up and were ready to ride.

Old Railroad Ross was giving Randy some instructions about the work, when they heard a lone horseman coming up the trail. They turned

and saw that the gaunt, stiff man astride the powerful horse was Judge Tarleton!

CHAPTER IV.

"ASSASSINATED, SIR, ASSASSINATED!"

A TABLEAU of stoicism was presented as Judge Tarleton rode up and stopped. The old planter had a gun on his hip. Railroad Ross stood like a block of granite, looking square at the visitor. Randy stood by his father's side. Both were armed, but no hostile gesture was made.

The young man's lips were drawn in a hard line. He knew that the Tarleton family had merely tolerated him as Zella's suitor, because she was the only daughter of the house, and usually had her way. His standing there, his hope of winning Zella had long hung by a slender thread.

What was Judge Tarleton's purpose? Would what the old planter had to say sever that thread? Worse still, would it sever the friendly relations between the two old families? He was not left long in doubt.

"Good morning, judge," greeted Railroad. "Won't you get down and come in?"

"No, sir, I won't get down," returned the judge, ignoring the greeting. "I won't go into your house now, and I don't know that I ever shall. I came over here to get some information about the murder of my son."

As he sat there on his horse, Judge Tarleton was the personification of family pride and resentment against a world in which any untoward thing could happen to a Tarleton. Railroad stood calmly looking his neighbor over, from his gray head crowned by a broad black hat, to his fine morocco-topped boots.

Tarleton's cheeks glistened from a fresh shave. He shaved from his temples to a line running from the mustache back to the hinge of the jaw, and

he shaved it every day. Below that line was a neatly trimmed beard that had once been black.

The high-bridged nose and other outstanding features that marked Zella and Ben were there. His very air and bearing bespoke the patrician. It said plainly that he didn't know and he didn't care a hang whether he was going to meet with hostility at the Railroad or not. When Ross didn't speak, he rapped out:

"Well, what have you got to say?" much as if the old ranchman had been a slave.

Railroad's face was as fixed as granite, and one expected it to break if he opened his mouth.

"I have to say that murder is a pretty hard word to use about that killing."

"That's what it was. Assassinated, sir, assassinated! I know my people. No Tarleton ever turned his back in a fight. Ben was murdered. Shot in the back by a cowardly assassin."

"That's pretty hard talk, judge. I don't think Ben was assassinated, because there ain't any assassins in my outfit. I wish you could see yo' way to change that word to something else."

"I'll change nothing! The boy was shot in the back. He wasn't fighting. His gun was still in the holster and hadn't been fired. I don't charge you with murder. I've known you a long time. You're rough, but I've found you square. All I want is for you to tell me who killed Ben. My sons and I will attend to the rest."

The tableau turned now. Railroad's lips were a grim line. Finally, he spoke:

"I'M sorry, judge, but I don't know. You haven't asked me how this mess came up, but I'm going to tell you. Bell Holderness and his gang comes here to make trouble and they made it. They killed one of my boys cold. Naturally, I and my men opened

on 'em, and they run. I ain't charging nothing against Ben. He was with the Holderness boys and when they ran, he did, and he was killed. Who killed him, I can't say. Several of us were shooting. They were a good distance from us, their horses were running, and ours were running. Whoever killed him was shooting at the crowd and happened to hit Ben."

"So, as near as you can come to it, your outfit murdered Ben?" and Tarleton's lips curled in a silent snarl.

"No, I don't put it that way. Ben was a wild boy. He got in bad company, and somebody in my outfit shot him. I'm sorry, for I don't think Ben had anything against me or the Railroad outfit."

"You admit the killing then! To me and my boys it was murder, and we have our own way of settling with murderers, whether it is one or a hundred. Lav and Cliff wanted to come with me, but I told them no. If you was friendly, and could explain and help us get the murderer, I could do more alone. If you wasn't friendly, I was enough to be shot in the back."

"That's more hard talk, judge," pleaded Railroad. "I, nor ary man in my outfit, ain't got a thing ag'in' you and your boys. Not one of us had anything ag'in' Ben. I've got trouble enough with the Holderness boys 'thout quarrelling with a family that's been friendly and my neighbors for years."

"Never mind that," snapped Tarleton. "I don't feel any blame for being friendly to you. Sometimes it takes a good many years to find people out." Then the judge shifted his glance to Randy's set face. "You have been treated as a friend and an equal at my house, young man. That's past. If you come there again, you come as one of the assassins of my son, and will be treated accordingly."

Randy winced, but didn't speak. He couldn't trust himself. Anyway, Railroad didn't give him a chance.

"Judge Tarleton," he said, as his brows knit, "you've made yourself pretty plain, and I don't know that talking more could do any good. If any trouble comes up between your family and my outfit, you'll have to start it."

"It's already up, sir!" and Tarleton whirled his horse and rode away.

"Too bad!" said Railroad to his son.

"Yes, it is too bad," admitted Randy, "but if nothing else will do them—"

"Wait a minute, Randy. I want to say a word to all of you. Judge Tarleton and his boys are good men—among the best in the country. I want every one of you to keep out of trouble with them if you possibly can without running from them. Mount and ride now, but keep your eyes open."

Without a word, Randy mounted and rode away, with Dolly by his side, and Sank and Con following at a little distance. They were heading toward the round-up grounds. Randy wasn't going to wait for a further demonstration from the Holderness gang. He was going to see what he could find along the river, where Leck and Pate had been killed.

When they reached the round-up ground, they saw Judge Tarleton look back, as he entered the timber on the trail that led up the river. He wasn't a half mile ahead of them, and was riding slowly, apparently to show that he wasn't afraid.

They rode on, entered the timber, and followed on up the trail. When a quarter of a mile from the narrows, they heard a single shot.

"Good God! They've shot the judge!" gasped Randy, and galloped on up the trail, with Dolly at his heels.

COMING out on the river bank, where they could see far ahead, they saw a horseman, sagging in his saddle and clinging desperately to the saddle horn. They knew it was Judge Tarleton, but as Randy quick-

ened his speed to go to the old planter's assistance, a gun cracked across the river. Randy's horse reared and crashed to the earth. He rolled free and came up behind a big cottonwood tree.

Dolly spurred his horse behind a thicket, dismounted and crept to the river bank. Something moved in the thicket on the other side of the stream. Dolly's carbine cracked, and a terrible yell came from the thicket. After that, silence.

"I don't know whether you ought to have done that or not, Dolly," said Randy. "You didn't see the man that shot at me, and you might shoot the wrong man."

Dolly looked at him with an odd glint in his blue eyes.

"See here now, Randy. Let's you and me get this straight before we go any further. Do we let that Holderness gang pot us, or don't we? If we're going to fight back, I'll stay with you. If we're going to be potted, why, I ain't ready to be potted, that's all."

"Oh, I mean to fight back and fight hard. I just want it to be in the open."

"Well, it won't be. That gang aims to bushwhack us. Do you know what that fellow's done for you?"

"Why, no, except that he missed me, hit my horse, and left me afoot."

"He's done a heap more than that. He's shot old Judge Tarleton, and the Tarleton boys will lay it on the Railroad outfit. The judge saw us following him, and if he gets home alive, which he probably will, he'll tell 'em it was us."

"Then let me have your horse, and I'll go on and catch up with the judge and tell him better."

"Yes, and he'd believe you, just like you'd believe the biggest liar you ever saw in your life. Now you listen to me. You got to do something more than just not be afraid. You got to use your head in this mess. I been thinking. The Holderness gang ain't just trying to square a mess that hap-

pened a hundred years ago. I don't know what they're after, but it's something else. Had you thought of what a hell of a long shot for a six-shooter it was from the Railroad outfit to where that gang went into the woods and Ben Tarleton fell?"

"Why, no. What of it?"

"Well, when Sank and me was out after the remuda yesterday evening, we met Con. He showed us where Mr. Ross and the boys turned back and it's full two hundred yards from there to where Ben fell!"

"I don't see—"

"I don't either, but I'm guessing. I don't believe anybody hit Ben that far with a six-shooter. I believe Bell Holderness shot Ben in the back, as they ran away."

"Bell did! Why would Bell kill one of his own gang?"

"Ben didn't exactly belong. He wasn't that sort. Couldn't be. He probably didn't know what the Holderness boys were up to when they went to the round-up. Maybe he said something about the killing of Asa. It might be, and likely was, that Bell simply figured that if Ben was killed at your round-up, it would put the Tarletons against you, instead of against them, as they would have been if Ben hadn't been killed."

"Dolly, do you suppose—"

"Yes, I suppose a whole lot of things; and among 'em, I suppose we better get your saddle off'n that dead broncho and get away from here."

SANK and Con had heard the shots, but misjudged the direction. They came up just as Randy was ready to mount behind Dolly for the return to the ranch. They all returned to the edge of the prairie. Dolly brought a fresh mount for Randy, and then they went into a general discussion of the situation.

Con Bates had been with the Railroad as far back as Randy could remember. He was a typical leather

face, and talked so little that people often wondered if he was dumb. He sat on his heels, listening, as the others talked. He heard Dolly's suggestion as to Bell Holderness having shot Ben. He listened to everything and said nothing. Finally, Randy turned to him.

"Con, you've been in many a mess like this. What do you think is the best way to handle it?"

"I been in plenty of messes," growled the wrinkled old puncher, "but none like this. They ain't no two alike. Besides that, I've never been in one when Bell Holderness was ramrodding the other side of the fight."

"A fight's a fight, ain't it?"

"Yes. Sometimes it's a dozen. This is apt to be that kind before it's over. I've known Bell Holderness all his life. He never made a horse trade in his life that he didn't plan every move in it before he said a word. When he brought his gang over here and killed Asa, he had all his plans made. He knows now that Asa and Pate are out of the way. He knows Railroad is too old to push the fight, and he thinks right now that he knows what you'll do."

"I guess he's mistaken about that," said Randy, with a wintry smile, "for I don't know myself."

"Maybe not, but you ain't done what he thought you would, and I don't believe you will."

"What was that?"

"He thought you'd go to Willow Mills and get drunk, and he'd pick a quarrel with you and kill you. Likely he still thinks so."

Randy shot a glance at Dolly, and then:

"He'll miss his guess, if he does. I may go to Willow Mills, but if Bell, or anybody else kills me, he'll kill me sober, and I'll be at the killing."

They rode south, up the hill, and out onto the prairie. The four of them were not together all the time. When noon came, Randy and Dolly stopped

under a lone hackberry tree, where they could see a considerable distance in every direction. They took the lunch from their saddle pockets and ate it. Randy was silent and thoughtful. At last he spoke:

"DOLLY, you look like a boy, but I know you're a lot older than I am. Anyway, you've been a man longer, for I never was a man until you pulled me out of the Cottonwood and made a man of me. I need help badly. We can't just sit still until they push us over."

"No, I reckon not," grinned Dolly, "but I got a picture of the one that pushes you over while you're still alive. You're so damn fightin' mad right now, Randy, that yore boots are scorching, and you don't know what's the matter with you. Way I look at it is this. Holderness is ahead of the game. He's got three of the Railroad outfit. He's got Ben Tarleton dead and the old judge shot, and got it all laid on us."

"I've proved to myself that I'm not afraid, Dolly, and now I'm ready for anything. If I could just see a place where we could strike, and strike hard, I'm rearing to break Bell's luck. You're right about me being mad."

They rode on back toward the ranch late in the afternoon. They were within half a mile of where Sank and Dolly hazed the band of cattle over the rimrock the day of the round-up, when they saw two riders, each leading a horse, coming in from the west.

"Why, that's Cub and Shorty. I wonder—" and Randy stopped.

"Them two and Keech and Brazos Jim went to town after the mail. I heard Mr. Ross tell 'em to go and for four of 'em to go together."

"Another mistake," said Randy, musingly. "Looked like a dare."

"Looks to me like somebody taken it up. Let's see what they got to say. What's happened, Shorty?"

"Nothing much," drawled the tallest puncher in the outfit, who had been dubbed Shorty. "We rides into town a little after noon. Cub and me goes to the post office, and Keech and Brazos went over to the Cottonwood to wait for us. When we got to the Cottonwood, Keech was layin' on the floor dead, and Brazos, he was down and bleedin'."

"As we stepped in to the place two guns went into our faces, and we was kindly invited to reach for the sky. We reached. Behind one of them guns was Lav Tarleton, and behind the other was Bell Holderness."

"No!"

"Yes, and a right smart of it. Then we got some news. We found out that the whole Railroad outfit confessed to murder. We found out just what we were. We found out that you, Randy, shot old Judge Tarleton in the back. Then we got turned loose, without our guns, to bring the glad tidings that unless Railroad—I mean Mr. Ross—would give up Randy and the man that kilt Ben, they was goin' to be war."

"'Bout thirty days late with that news," said Dolly. "Everybody that ain't blind or crazy, knew it all."

"What did they kill Keech and Brazos for?" asked Randy.

"Not a thing in the world. Keech killed one of Bell's gang, and Brazos two. That was all. We heard the shooting, and thought it was just in fun—but it wasn't."

"Where did Bell and Lav go?" asked Randy.

"They shooed us down the lane as far as the big house. Then they turned us loose to drift, and they went in the house."

"In the house! Bell Holderness went in Tarleton's house?"

It was what Holderness had been trying to get the right to do, ever since Zella became grown. Randy's world was falling about his ears.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Gray God

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Cardinal's Curse," "Whirlwind Walsh," etc.

With savage yells, the black men from the pirate schooner burst into view



Broke and almost "on the beach" in the Fiji Islands, Bob Stanton hardly guessed that just around the corner lay the maddest adventure life could offer in the tropics

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

"TYPICAL TROPICAL TRAMP!"

BOB STANTON walked along the main street of Suva, painfully conscious that people looked at him as if he was a beach comber. He was not quite that—yet—though he was not many degrees removed from it, he told himself. His ducks and his linen, if they were frayed, were clean; he managed, with old blades and the horrible soap supplied by his landlady, to keep shaved; the soles of his shoes were broken, but the uppers were carefully pipe-clayed. He was still respectable, but his hair needed cutting and his browned features were beginning to wear an expression that made even the kilted native police look at him askance.

Not to mention the tourists. A steamer was in. Men and women were strolling or driving, tropic clad, agog

for entertainment, planning luncheon. Some had *lei* garlands about their necks placed there by welcoming friends. Friends! There were certainly times when a fellow needed one, Stanton reflected. There might be Americans in that laughing crowd intent upon enjoyment. Perhaps if they knew the plight he was in, from no fault of his own—

He shoved his hands deeper in his empty pockets, crossing over from the row of stores with plate glass fronts, hotels and clubs, to the shore side of the street. He walked in the checkered, changing shadow of the palms and poincianas, which patterned the path with purple and gold.

Across the stretch of seagrass lawn the Goro Sea showed incredibly blue, blue as laundry blueing. The sky was hardly less vivid. Cliffs of pearly trade wind clouds lifted on the horizon.

The breeze raised the banners of bananas, rustled in the fronds of coconut and royal palms, sent down a drift of scarlet poinciana blossoms like carnival confetti. A glorious, gorgeous mockery of a day.

He had the makings of two cigarettes, perhaps three thin ones, and that was all. No tobacco, no money to buy any. He was three weeks in debt to his half-caste landlady, three weeks in board-arrears to Cheung Li. Broke. Stony broke.



They hadn't said a thing about it yet, but they would not, could not trust him forever.

There was the sting of it; they had trusted him. He had not lied to them about coming remittances, but had frankly said he was flat, and they had smiled and said he was an American and they knew he would pay them when he could. That seemed a long way off right now.

A girl was coming toward him, from the steamer, unaccompanied. She was simply dressed, she was slender, but walked with a certain agile vigor that distinguished her. Stanton almost bumped into her on the narrow path in his absorption. He got a glimpse of a pair of dark blue eyes, large, clear, but not carefree; a short nose, red lips that drooped a little, a hint of coppery hair under the close-fitting hat.

He raised his own, in apology, and the girl bowed. She did not smile, but looked at him curiously, sympathetical-

ly. He did not analyze that look for a few minutes. Then he realized that her face, like his own, must have betrayed worryment, was not in accord with the gorgeous day. She was in trouble of

some sort, even as he was, and she had recognized the latter fact. /

ABOUT ten paces behind the girl a man was walking with a curious ease of gait, pantherish, slightly furtive for all his swagger, for all his linen tunic and pants, his silk shirt and cummerbund, the smart puggaree on his hat of woven palm fiber, the short gold-tipped malacca cane, the silken socks and shoes of buckskin and tan leather.

His skin was the color of saddle leather, splotted by darker blots, like freckles. His eyes were jet-black, set aslant, the lids smooth and unwrinkled, the mouth full-lipped, cruel. A cunning, sensual "breed," half Chinese and half native, swaggering along with a knife under his cummerbund, and gambler's gold in his pockets, Stanton fancied.

The American suddenly wondered, with a hunch that flashed into his mind,

whether the man was following the girl. For a moment Stanton halted, rolling his cigarette, looking back. The girl had crossed the street, the half-breed kept straight on. He might be following her, but he did not seem inclined to annoy her. Too careful of his own skin, Stanton decided. He would behave himself in the open, but he was no more to be trusted in the shadows than a roving shark in a lagoon.

Stanton knew him by name—Loo Fong—and by his reputation, or lack of it, along the waterfront where Stanton had his cheap but clean room with Panakaloo, the stout half-white widow of a trading skipper.

Loo Fong, petty pirate, smuggler, gambler, half Malay, half Manchu, and treacherous as a snake, was just back from one of his occasional disappearances. He had given Stanton a look, tinged with a sneer of derision on his twisting mouth, that made the American's fists double automatically.

He crossed the street himself, caught sight of his reflection in a store window as he checked to let a jovial group pass out of the car that had brought them from the ship and enter the Victoria Hotel.

A woman glanced at him and said something in a whisper to her escort. The man was less tactful of tone in his answer.

"T. T. T.," he replied. "Eh, what? Typical Tropical Tramp! Beach bum! Never has worked, can't get work, and doesn't want to." The woman looked at him again and shrank a little. It was then the plate glass revealed to Stanton his mask of a face, grim, almost haggard, the long hair covering the collar of his coat, the set jaws and smoldering eyes.

"Got to snap out of that," he told himself. "You're nursing a grouch. It won't get you a thing, not a damn' thing, Bob Stanton! It's the grin that wins."

He was not so sure of that. He had been grinning a long time, but the grin

had frayed, like the bottoms of his pants and the cuffs of his coat and shirts. There was no job in Suva, in all the Fijis, for a "Yank." It was fair enough, perhaps. Jobs seemed to be scarce and anything that a self-respecting white man would do was held out for a Britisher.

He had come out to join a man he had known in the States. They had been comrades in the Argonne, as a matter of fact. It was after an Armistice Day dinner that Raymond had told him of his plan to log and ship the valuable hardwoods of the Fijis to American cabinet-makers. The islands off the north and west of Viti Levu were crammed with such trees, it appeared. Stanton had put in his share for preliminaries and had left for Fiji after the jubilant letter saying that the lease was secured and the prospects rosy. It had taken almost all he had by the time he reached Suva and, while he was *en route*, the bubble had been pricked.

The British commissioner had received word from the colonial secretary that no leases or concessions were to be granted on Fijian products to other than *bona-fide* British concerns. The bill had passed "as of" a date before that of Raymond's concessions. It was a washout. The commissioner was polite, bored, and his expressed sorrow was tinged with a suggestion that Americans had better stick to their own possessions.

There were hardwoods, the commissioner believed, in the Philippines. Whether or not he knew the Washington policies that protected the countrymen of Aguinaldo to the exclusion of all outside capital, they did not learn.

Raymond cursed heartily and ingeniously, outside the commissioner's stately residence. He offered Stanton his fare back, but Stanton knew his friend had little enough left for himself. The lure of the tropics had gripped Stanton, and he had no doubt but that he could get along. He had,

for twelve weeks of enforced loafing, on fifty dollars.

IT looked like the bush or the beach for him, living on fruit and fish, a down-and-outer. It was getting hard to be philosophical, to believe in such platitudes as "It is always darkest before the dawn," and "Every cloud has a silver lining."

Nevertheless, after that self-revealing glance at the grim mask that was his face, Bob Stanton mentally girded up his loins and marched on, resolved to borrow a pair of scissors from Panakaloea to trim the frayed edges of his garments and essay a haircut. He was getting morbid. He whistled as he marched along and looked a sergeant of police squarely in the eyes. Lately he had been bothering a bit about deportation, or a request to move on.

Confound that fellow with his T. T. T. What did he know about them? T. T. T.'s were the salt of the earth, often prosperous, always efficient, cursed or blessed with the roving heel. The chap had said Stanton didn't want to work, whereas he had been hunting it high and low until he could feel the grit working through his shoes at every step. He whistled the swinging march song:

*Pack all your troubles in your old kit-bag,
And smile, smile, smile.*

Lots of craft in the harbor, freight steamers, sailing ships, the big passenger boat, native craft, launches shuttling back and forth. Usually they made him restless, emphasized his marooned condition. Now he grinned at them. Much magic in a grin, after all. But he didn't get his haircut.

He reached the wharf and swung south to where Panakaloea's little house was set among scrubs and papaia trees on the limits of white residency. A topsail schooner was moored to bollards, her cargo of copra and turtle shell being discharged.

A black man lay on a bale, shivering in the sun. He was almost a dwarf, a Melanesian, not a Fijian. His frizzy hair was dull red from lime bleaching, his dark skin showed tribal weals and other scars. His only clothing was a scanty loincloth. The lobes of his ears were stretched to flaps of torn leather, a short clap pipe thrust through one of the convenient holes. A South Sea savage, sick and shuddering, ugly, ill-shaped, dirty. His ribs showed like those of a starved dog. His eyes were closed and his limbs were huddled about his emaciated body.

Any blackbird would have despised him. Stanton wondered how he had come to Suva, derelict and unhappy as a mangy cur.

A man in a peaked cap, dressed in dungarees and a grimy pyjama top was directing the last of the unloading, chewing and spitting tobacco between curses in beach-English. As the file-closer of the Kanakas he had been bossing disappeared into the warehouse shed, the man, apparently mate of the schooner, turned and saw the wretched figure on the bale. He had a rope's end tucked in his belt, a length of coil ending in a turkshead knot, symbol of authority over his Solomon Island crew.

He swung it aloft and brought it down on the cowering creature who woke to his shouted oaths. It curled with a vicious hiss and sounded like a drum-stroke as it raised a blistering mark.

"You walk along damn' quick out of this, you blasted stowaway monkey, before I flay you," he cried and swung up his arm again as the man leaped from the bale and crouched, long ape-like arms wrapped about his head, jabbering something inarticulate. The rope's end writhed around his ribs with the same hideous strum. The third blow did not fall. The mate's arm remained aloft as he gazed in astonishment at the sudden appearance of Stanton between him and his victim.

"Git out of here, you lousy beach bum!" the mate yelled. He started to say more, but Stanton's fist muzzled him.

INDIGNATION at the wanton cruelty had caused Stanton to interfere, but all the resentment he had swallowed in the sneer of Loo Fong and the words of the woman's escort outside the hotel, went into that wallop when the mate called him a bum. He had been hard up, but, thanks to Cheung and Panakaloo, he had not starved or lacked decent quarters. He was husky and he knew how to use his fists. The mate didn't. He was a bucko, a good brawler, and he was tough, inside and out, but he made a serious first mistake in underestimating his adversary, and rushing him.

Stanton ducked neatly and smote him hard over the liver as the mate's haymaker swung overhead and the mate swung with it, off balance, staggering sidewise with a clip on the side of the jaw. He went to one knee and hand, and Stanton let him up, which was chivalrous but wasted.

"Get up, you coward, and take a licking from a 'bum!'" Stanton snapped, while the mate spat blood and tobacco from his battered lips, uttered a roar and rushed again. The seaman got a straight left to his face which checked him, but he closed in, bellowing and bludgeoning. The Kanakas had come out of the warehouse and were looking on, eyes rolling, grinning. The cook came out of the schooner's galley and stood with folded arms, another spectator who seemed not opposed to the prospects of the mate's getting trimmed.

They clinched and Stanton appreciated what a bucko might do at close quarters. The mate got his arms about his ribs and nearly cracked them as he forged on with the advantage of his weight, using his knee, trying to trip, cursing constantly, threatening, putting out his full strength. Stanton beat a

tattoo on his kidneys and he didn't like it. They struck the stringpiece and went down together, rolling over and over, rebounding as the side of the schooner saved them from the water.

As they rolled the mate made another mistake. Every time Stanton was on top he slogged at the bucko's head and jaws, and hurt him badly enough to make the mate try the same tactics. The bucko got home more than once, but it gave Stanton the chance to get up and away. He intended to keep away. The mate was as hard as an automobile tire, strong as a gorilla; he had the weight and superior strength. Stanton had the science and the better wind. The other was blowing as he got to his feet and, before he got set, Stanton got in a jolt to the belly and a second smash over the mouth.

The combination settled it, together with the quid the mate had neglected to eject. The force of the blow sent it into his windpipe, choking and half strangling him. Upset muscular control juggled it into his gullet and Stanton's third and final blow in that rally drove it deep. His disturbed stomach received and ejected it. His tanned face turned a sickly green. He heaved violently and was distressingly and unpleasantly sick, teetering up the gangway, using the scupperway, weaving down the companionway to his cabin.

Stanton straightened his clothes, felt gingerly a fiery ear and a bruised cheek, looking for the cause of his interference.

"You did 'm in proper, mister. You 'andled your dukes pretty. It served the bloody blighter right," said the cook. "I'm quittin' 'ere. 'E ain't got no idea of decency, 'e ain't. Called my grub 'stinkin' 'ash.' I 'ope the beggar 'eaves up his spotted soul."

The miserable black was clasping Stanton's knees, jabbering at him, his eyes moist with gratitude. It embarrassed the American. The Kanakas were gathered in an uncertain knot, but

the cook shouted at them and they went aboard.

"Looks like you 'ad 'im on your 'ands, mister," the cook said to Stanton. "All syme stray dorg. You'll 'ave a 'ard time gittin' rid of 'im."

"Where did he come from? What's the matter with him?"

"We figger 'e must 'ave swum off and 'id aboard, the time we watered at Tuimoto. Probably was in wrong with 'is wizard. Thought the ship 'u'd be better than the ovens. I'll bet 'e's changed 'is mind more'n once. We was glad enough to git clear without trouble. Tuimoto is no picnic-ground. The skipper was sick—*island fever*—an' mate run things. 'E kicked the day-lights out of that boy. Come night throwin' 'im overboard to the sharks. 'E ain't 'ad too much to eat. Don't like white man's *kaikai* an' the Kanakas wouldn't share theirs with 'im. That's part of what's the matter with 'im. And 'e's got yaws. You better tyke my tip and 'and 'im over to the police, mister. 'E belongs in the 'orse-pittle, 'e does. Croak on your 'ands if you don't. 'Is nyme's Tiki and I bet 'e's full of 'em."

A muffled roar came from below and the cook winked at Stanton.

"That's the mate," he said. "Wants a nurse. I'll nurse 'im!" He sauntered aft.

The miserable devil who seemed to have been wished on Stanton, ill-treated and frightened by his surroundings, groveled at his feet. He shivered like a frightened dog when Stanton put a hand on his skinny shoulder. He didn't quite know what to do with the wretch—he'd die in the hospital from sheer loneliness. Turn his face to the wall and let his soul leach out of him.

Stanton could put a meal into him, let him know he had a friend. His own plight was pleasant compared to that of this spiritless remnant of humanity. Perhaps Panakaloea would let him stay, give him something he could assimilate.

3 A

"You come with me," he said. "We get *kaikai*."

Tiki understood the meaning and followed him like a black dog, his eyes shining. Panakaloea was a bit difficult. She wanted no black fellows, she declared, but at last Stanton persuaded her to let Tiki—who stood on one bow leg, scratching with the toes of the other at his yaws while they discussed him—stay in a shed in the little garden on some old matting. He lay down, curled up, sacking over him and presently Panakaloea set down beside him a bowl of native *poi* and some dried fish. His eyes glittered. His spirit revived. He was in the house of friends and he ate avidly. Stanton went off to his own meal.

CHAPTER II.

CHEUNG'S PLAN.

CHEUNG LI'S restaurant did not cater to the social element of Suva, but it was neat and clean, the food savory, wholesome and cheap, so that he did a good waterfront business with white skippers, mates and supercargoes.

He lived above the place, a placid, stout, sphinx-faced Chinaman with a dignity all his own, getting together his fortune. Some said the restaurant was a blind for his other affairs, but no one seemed to definitely know what they might be. He extended credit from time to time and seemed to find it profitable in the long run. It was he himself who had suggested to Stanton that he need not worry about his bill.

"Some time soon, something come along," he told him. "You 'Melican. You make good bimeby."

He presided over the restaurant at rush hours, leaving its conduct the rest of the time to two assistants. One of these, Moy, long, sallow, cadaverous and chary of any speech but his own, set before Stanton his meal. There was real turtle soup, excellent fish, turtle

steak with boiled *taro*-root and greens, fresh coconut pudding with caramel sauce, and coffee the Ritz patrons might have envied. All for fifty cents; a dollar and twenty cents for three daily meals, seven dollars a week.

When Moy brought the pudding he had a message.

"Cheung Li like speak along of you topside when you finish up," he said.

It spoiled the dessert for Stanton. It must mean that his credit was over. It had to come. Cheung had been mighty decent. But it looked like the beach. He couldn't stay at Panakaloe's and not eat. He couldn't honestly stay there any longer and pile up a debt he saw no means of paying off. Panakaloe could always rent her rooms. He saw himself for a moment roaming the beach with Tiki at his heels, adventuring in the bush with a cannibal. Tiki would know more about making a living there than he did.

He shrugged his shoulders, his hands steady as he rolled his second cigarette. There was not enough left for a third, so he made this fat and smoked it slowly with long inhalations before he got up, unable to tip Moy. An outside staircase led to a balcony that ran all round the house, covered and awninged. At the rear it looked over a compound garden behind a high plank wall where Cheung took his ease with his family.

Stanton had never mounted before. He was surprised at the signs of comfort, of taste, even of luxury. There were easy chairs of bamboo, stands of teak, that held flowering plants, big vases of porcelain with foliage shrubs and ferns in them, rugs, cushions, two Java thrushes singing in cages, a gorgeous blue macaw in a ring, statuesque, disdainful.

The front veranda, where Stanton thought the entrance must be, looked over the harbor and the shipping, and across Kadavu Passage to the distant isles of Ono and Kadavu, almost sixty miles away. The lure of the horizon,

of the unknown tropics, savage but fascinating, gripped him hard. Then sliding glass doors opened and Cheung asked him inside.

He had never before seen Cheung except in white clothes, and he was surprised at the quiet richness of his brocades, the assurance of his manner, polite, unostentatious. He might have been greeting a distinguished official rather than a man whose clothing proclaimed his poverty.

He offered Stanton a deep and cosy seat and a cheroot faintly smelling of tea, gratifying of flavor. Then he poured out two tiny goblets of amber fluid that scented the whole room as if with orange groves and tasted like sublimated Chartreuse.

His English was not perfect, but he spoke without hesitation, straight to the purpose. It was as if he guessed Stanton's interpretation of the request for the visit, and wished to relieve him promptly. The shady chamber had an atmosphere of courtesy. From the interior Stanton heard the tinkle of a stringed instrument, the sudden laughter of a child. The Java thrushes were singing madly.

"I tell you some time, soon, something come along," said Cheung in his mellow tones. "I not know then this come. One time, some one tell me about one place where there are plenty pearl, on island where nobody go. No landing there, no loadstead, no lagoon. Leaf come up close, evely place. Native not live that place now. Name Motutabu. Plenty magic along that place. Bad magic. Maybe you not believe that?"

"I don't know," said Stanton simply. "I've heard a lot of curious things."

Cheung grunted as if satisfied with the answer.

"This black man's magic," he said. "Not evil to white man, yellow man unless they too much meddle. You savvy?"

"I savvy," said Stanton. His pulses

were quickening, his blood beginning to tingle. He felt that he was on the threshold of adventure, mysterious, dangerous.

"ON that island one big image," Cheung went on. "Not idol, all same symbol. Symbol of evil spilits native men speak velley soft along, make gift so he leave alone. Some one meddle along that god, not savvy how, die velly quick. Suppose you go this place, you leave god alone. I send white man I know along this Motutabu—that mean fo'bidden island. He is good man, I tust him plenty. I send Kanaka with him to dive. No one come back. Long time now they should come back. Something happen. Maybe he meddle too much along that god, maybe all get sick, maybe schooner get on leef. I not know."

"I am li'l afraid some one else speak along the Kanaka who tell me about that place. Li'l while since he speak with me, they find him dead along beach. Maybe because he talk, maybe because he no talk. Nobody savvy who kill him. I no savvy. I think maybe one man, half Chinaman, he savvy something. Maybe he go along Motutabu, but suppose he did he not find pearl. If he find pearl he not come back to Suva. He go to Sigapo'. Belong that place. But I like find out."

Singapore! Stanton had the flash, half intuition, half reasoning, that is called a hunch. Singapore meant the Malay Peninsula. In his mind's eye he saw the lithe figure of the Malay-Manchu, swaggering but furtive, like a stalking panther, trailing the girl. He did not know then how illuminating his hunch had been. But the name came to his lips. "Loo Fong!"

Cheung grunted again.

"I always think you smaht," he said. "Li'l bad luck, maybe, jus' now. Loo Fong come back. I think he been along that island. Maybe he kill. But I think he no find pearl. I like send you."

"I'm no sailor," Stanton disclaimed. "I've knocked about in a pleasure boat or two, yachting, but I'm no navigator."

"I give you ship," Cheung purred on. "Captain and clew all same, they lun ship. Chinamen. On island you boss. You find out what happen. Man I send to island is 'Melican, all same you 'Melican. Suppose I send Chinamen, suppose Loo Fong been that place, my man no tust any one but white man. His name Haines. I pay you good. Suppose you bling back pearls, I give you plenty."

"You don't know anything about me," said Stanton. He was not demurring to the proposition, but it had taken him off his feet a bit. It sounded like a large order.

He did not lack confidence in himself, but this was a strange situation he was asked to take command of. He could not immediately see himself on a boat manned by Chinese, going to an island where some god, some symbol of evil, was supposed to reign with malign influence; where murder might have been done. He wanted to think it over, though he wanted to go, aside from obliging Cheung.

"I savvy plenty," Cheung went on suavely. "You have bad luck; you live cheap, not dlink, not lun up big bill at big hotel. You tly all time find any kind of job. Not easy fo' 'Melican along this place. Li'l time ago you fight mate of Lehua. I like 'Melican who not blag, not dlink, can fight. I like you velly much to go this trip."

Stanton wondered a little at the other's knowledge of the fight, but it was not surprising. Such news traveled fast. The restaurant was a sort of club, in some ways. He was to wonder more how closely Cheung had studied him.

"To-day steameh come," Cheung went on. "Haines, he had bad luck too, long time. He tlade in copla, have bad luck. He go fo' shell an' pearl, have bad luck. Lose schooneh, find shell eaten by oyster worm. His

wife die in United States. Then he catch job with me. He lile back to his daughteh, pletty soon he make money. She no heah flom him long time befo'. Now velly glad. She come to Suva. Come to-day. She nice gel. I tell about her fatheh. She wollied, but she keep up chin all same you, 'Melican fashion. She want to go look fo' him. I say she can go along with you."

Stanton gasped. Things were developing fast. He knew who the girl was. She would recognize him when she saw him. He guessed why Loo Fong had trailed her. Loo Fong knew of the island if he had not been there. It was likely he had tried to pump the native who had first given Cheung the information, and killed the poor devil. Why the latter had chosen to confide in Cheung did not matter now. It was Cheung's affair. Probably the man was indebted to him.

"I saw Loo Fong following a girl who came in on the Austral, I think," he said. Again Cheung gave one of his soft grunts of comprehension.

"Loo Fong plenty slick," he said. "I think he savvy gel ask fo' me. She go along hotel now she come my place. Mo' betteh she stay this place. Loo Fong savvy that, savvy you come see me, maybe savvy why. *Maskee!* I think maybe you have to kill Loo Fong some time."

HE spoke placidly enough, but, to Stanton, the room seemed suddenly filled with a mist in which vague, battling figures moved, while in the background there loomed the statue of a great, gray god and the suggestion of fantastic cliffs and jungle.

He was looking on, now, but he was about to be involved in this. Pearls, magic, murder. Mystery and sudden death. Romance. The girl's face with the big eyes that had changed when they saw him, as if there had been between them some affinity, was plain before him. He heard Cheung clap his

hands, and then the girl herself was in the room, in the flesh, gazing at him as he rose.

"Missy Haines," Cheung was saying. "This Misteh Stanton. I think he go along Motutabu fo' me."

Her hand was in his, cool and firm, her gaze was searching him, frank, friendly.

"You don't mind if I go along?" she said. "I want to know what has happened to my father, I want to see him again. He left me in school, six years ago."

"Mind?" Stanton was filled with an idiotic desire to say the things that crowded his brain, to give utterance to the impulses that thrilled him. To acknowledge the joy that surged through him at the prospect of being her knight-errant, her champion. There was no question now of his not going. If Cheung had reserved this argument for the last, he had chosen wisely. Stanton's actual answer was stiff, awkward.

"I shall be glad to serve you, if I can, to help your father, to be of use to Cheung Li, who has befriended me."

"As he did my father," said the girl. Stanton thought he heard Cheung chuckle, but his face was immobile.

"That settled," he said. "Now Stanton, talk business along with me. Much to fix, quick as possible. Tomorrow, maybe nex' day, you go."

The girl left and Cheung talked business. His schooner, with the Chinese skipper and crew, were at Levuka on the island of Ovalau, former capital of Fiji. It was not far away, less than fifty miles, and he had sent word to them, expecting them tomorrow. He gave Stanton money to buy necessary personal things, promising to furnish him weapons. Motutabu was not on the regulation charts. It lay far to the south and west, below the Kermadec Islands. Cheung showed its position on a chart. At the end of the interview he gave certain grave warnings.

"I think Loo Fong go that place," he said. "Not find pearl. If he savvy I send you I think he go back. Follow you, make plenty trouble. Much betteh he stay along that place."

There was a grim note in his voice that more than hinted his meaning. Cheung had not attempted to dodge the fact that the trip was dangerous. He seemed at once to value life and consider it of little value, like the money changer who promptly throws out spurious coin. The crew of his schooner would be armed. He had not sent Chinese in the first place because natives were better divers; his own men were unused to pearling, he used them for inter-island trading. But they were fighters. They were his men.

Stanton was convinced that those who worked for Cheung were loyal, bound by a fealty that went beyond pay. He saw depths to this man who was running a lowly restaurant and living in something close to luxury. He realized that the restaurant was a clearing house for gossip, valuable to such a person as Cheung; shrewd, daring, efficient, he bent his energies toward fortune, but was endowed with philosophy, a mode of thought and life that raised him far above the ordinary.

"You not meddle along that god," Cheung said, the last thing. "And you look out along of Loo Fong. You look out along that mate you fight. Suppose you want take along that Tiki, can do. Maybe he can be useful along in bush. That mate name Johnson. Schooneh Lehua. Captain Fenwick, he sick, he stay in Suva. Cook quit too. Loo Fong he hold share in Lehua. You look out. Take this now."

He took from a drawer in a lacquered cabinet a flat automatic of German make, a vicious-looking thing of heavy caliber. As it lay cold in Stanton's palm it seemed like some sort of fetish that was a tangible link connecting him with the adventure, making it real. Cheung gave him extra clips.

"Knife betteh," he said. "Make no noise. Suppose you have to shoot, may make trouble. But knife need practice. You take. Johnson got no use fo' you. Loo Fong may think you savvy where to find pearl. I no savvy that. I think Haines hide all time, but I not know what place. Suppose he dead, you tly find pearl. I see you this time to-morrow."

STANTON slid the automatic away into his hip pocket, and Cheung shook his head.

"Pocket no good," he said. "Wait, I find."

He opened a chest and produced a spring clip-holder and leather shoulder-harness which Stanton fitted then and there, taking off his coat. The flat weapon lay close to his chest, snug and handy. There would be other revolvers on board, with belts and holsters for open use, but this manner was best, when one wore a coat, in Suva.

The police did not like foreigners to swank about with visible weapons. It was an orderly and peaceful town, but many strange things went on near by. There was the Rewa River, up which there was said to be a hidden headquarters for fugitives and outlaws of all kinds and races, waiting for secret transportation beyond extradition. Back of that, in the mountains, drums sounded on certain moonlit midnights, and the natives were still said to practice ancient and horrible rites of cannibalism and sacrifice.

Suva was civilized. Fiji was pacified. But savagery lurked on every hand.

Stanton made his purchases unostentatiously. He held the notion that he was shadowed. He saw nothing of Loo Fong, but that crafty individual had his following, who might be trailing Stanton for him. Stanton was barbered, reclothed, reshod, his own man again. His account with Cheung's restaurant was wiped out. He paid Panakaloo, together with a present of

a vivid scarf which she draped proudly across her ample bosom, tears in her eyes as she thanked him and applauded his turn of fortune.

He had native tobacco and a new pipe for Tiki, with cloth for a *sulu* kilt with which to replace his inadequate G-string. The old pipe had been smashed on the wharf, he had not tasted the flavor of tobacco or its smoke for weeks, and his gratitude was inordinate. It was dark by then, and Stanton left him curled up on his mats, smoking blissfully.

Stanton stayed close that night, sitting in Panakaloa's little garden, smoking and thinking over the swift changes of chance. He had turned a sudden corner and he did not know what lay ahead, save that it was a man's work, savored with excitement and peril, heightened by the entrance of the girl.

He slept with the automatic on his chest, over his pyjama top. It was heavy but handy, and he did not take Cheung's warnings lightly. Loo Fong might well believe, as Cheung had suggested, that Stanton was going to Motutabu and knew where to find the pearls Cheung was sure Haines had gathered.

In such a case they might decide to try to force that information out of him, kidnap and torture him, rather than risk losing a race to the island.

So Loo Fong had a share in the Lehua. The mate was in actual charge of the schooner, to all intents and purposes its skipper. Loo Fong and the mate would almost certainly get together. Johnson had his own grudge against Stanton, which might materialize on its own account or join forces with Loo Fong in his plans.

It seemed very likely indeed to Stanton that the Lehua might have been to Motutabu on the trip from which she had just returned, with Loo Fong in her. The cargo was more or less of a blind, picked up after the trail for the pearls had failed.

If Tiki had been able to talk anything but his uncouth dialect Stanton might have been able to find out from him. The cook would know; he was probably leaving for some more definite reason than Johnson's slurs on his cooking. If anything serious had happened on Motutabu the cook might have decided to draw the line at piracy and quit while his neck was still unstretched, in which case it was not likely that he would talk. He had not been very prepossessing, as Stanton recollected. It was a rough outfit.

CHEUNG would undoubtedly find out all that it was possible to gather. Stanton felt that Cheung had not fully divulged himself in their talk, that he knew or suspected far more than he had mentioned. And Stanton was convinced that there had been grim doings on Motutabu and would be more. It seemed doubtful if the girl's father was still alive. If he were not, it would be no easy task to find the pearls. There would be the girl to comfort and protect. If Loo Fong followed and was again frustrated of the gems, he might consider the girl a secondary prize, so much loot for his personal gratification and disposal.

Small doubt of that, Stanton fancied, remembering the way in which the half-caste had trailed her. This mission was not the sort in which a girl should be involved, but he knew that she was fully committed to it, that Cheung was either willing she should go, or had tried to dissuade her and failed. Tonight she was safe enough at Cheung's. Cheung's measure of precaution would baffle even Loo Fong. Stanton felt certain, and took comfort from it.

Panakaloa's house was far from a fortress, built in flimsy, tropic fashion. It held no treasures, the window fastenings were light, the doors had no bolts. The one to the back garden did not even have a key, and the garden fence was easily scaled.

Stanton was a light sleeper. He held a hunch that the night was breeding some sort of attempt, and he hoped to be ready for it when it appeared. He dozed in cat-naps, waking intermittently, dropping off again. Then, a little after midnight, he was roused by some unusual sound that brought him standing to the floor, gun in hand, listening, watching. Whatever had wakened him was veiled by sleep, but his consciousness insisted there had been something.

There was no moon. The garden lay in mellow, tropic starlight, filled with deep, soft shadows that shifted shape as the land wind moved fronds and leafage. He saw nothing else; he stole to the door and listened, opening it suddenly, finger on trigger.

It looked as if a great dog were lying down on the threshold. In the vague light from the window he saw the faint glint of uprolled eyes. It was Tiki. From gratitude or fidelity, prompted perhaps by some sense developed in his savage subconsciousness of impending peril, he had come in from his shed to get as close to his protector as he could.

"All right, Tiki," Stanton said quietly. "Good boy." It was like talking to a dog, using tone to convey meaning. Tiki clucked something in his throat as Stanton closed the door.

It was not easy to doze again after the thorough rousing. The actions of the day, filmed in his brain, were automatically projected on the mental screen.

He was no longer a derelict. No one would venture to call him or describe him as a beach bum now. He had decent clothes, money in his pocket, had fought and won, acquired a cannibal Man Friday, met a girl who stirred feelings within him that he had never before experienced, and he was embarked upon a wild enterprise in a savage setting. At last the flickering flash-backs died out, and his mind became a blank.

The next thing he knew was a faint draft of air. The door was open, a dark space where its paint had shown gray. The windows, opening lengthwise, were apart. He could smell the night blossoms, *ylang-ylang*, *frangipani*. As he swung off the bed something touched his arm. It was Tiki, crouching low, hardly visible, pointing an arm, vaguely silhouetted, at the window. Then he darted off, merging with the gloom, back toward the open door.

THE tops of croton bushes came above the sill. The wind moved them, or was it something else? Stanton sat on the edge of the bed, his gun ready to cover any intruder, remembering Cheung's caution that shooting would bring trouble, wondering if he could be plainly seen. He felt eyes watching him from the shrubbery, thought he could make out some solid bulk amid the leaves. It was so still, so charged with suspense, that he could hear the ticking of his watch.

Then there came a scuffle in the passage. Tiki had attacked, or been attacked. At any rate, fed, and fortified by having a friendly master, Tiki was fighting fiercely. Two struggling figures, locked in desperate battle, rolled into the room.

Stanton caught the gleam of steel. Tiki had no weapon. He launched himself from the edge of the bed, smashing at the hand that held the blade with the muzzle of his gun, trying to locate the intruder's head. It was an impossible task in the darkness and the fury of the combat. He could tell only that the man was far bigger than Tiki, and at that, like Tiki, he was practically naked. He could smell the rank sweat of him.

For the moment he had forgotten the window, been forced to leave it unguarded, suddenly aware of forms rising, writhing over the sill as he whirled.

One of them was clothed and burly, the other a stinking savage, rancid with palm oil, slippery as an eel. A sleeved arm was flung in front of Stanton, thrust hard against his throat to cut off his wind. He broke into tumultuous action, grasping the thick wrist with both hands, turning, stooping, putting all he had into a heaving pull of his back and shoulders. The weight of his adversary bore him down to one knee, but Stanton flung him heels over head, crashing into the flimsy bureau; then Stanton dived for the legs of the third man, and brought him down across the bed, close to the foot of it, bounding on the springs beneath the mattress.

Stanton leaped on him before he could get up or free the knife he surely carried in his loin-cloth. The native's hands clawed for Stanton's throat, lacerating the flesh. Stanton gripped one arm, bent it backward on the iron railing of the bed, bent it until it cracked. The savage yelled, leaping convulsively in his pain, and rolled to the floor.

Tiki and his man were in the doorway again. Stanton heard their panting grunts, and marveled at Tiki's resistance. The big man he had thrown was getting up. There was electricity in Suva, and Panakaloea had bulbs in her house. Stanton had no chance to get at his switch, but suddenly the passage was illumined and an Amazonian voice angrily demanded what was going on.

Panakaloea appeared, a shawl over her voluminous nightgown. She was brandishing a club that had been part of her skipper husband's collection of island weapons. The man had Tiki by the throat, squeezing him until his eyes bulged from their sockets, his tongue protruding. Panakaloea's club thudded down, and the seeming victor collapsed. Stanton saw the other native scramble over the sill dangling his broken arm. The clothed man rose from the ruins of the bureau and flung

a chair at Stanton before he followed. It came legs first, hard enough to check Stanton's leap.

The two were gone, smashing through the shrubbery, up to the roof of Tiki's shed by means of the rain-barrel Panakaloea used for watering her garden, and over the fence.

PANAKALOEa and the light had routed them, aside from her by no means to be despised club. They had no desire for the publicity her indignant voice and arm might evoke. Stanton did not get a clear look at the face of the man who had thrown the chair, the room was still in partial shadow, but he was almost certain it had been Johnson, mate of the *Lehua*, and the other two were Solomon Islanders, members of the crew.

The one still lay senseless from the blow of the hardwood club. He was as black as Tiki, but bigger; his sharp filed teeth showing in the relaxed jaw. For a moment Stanton thought Panakaloea had killed him, and said so. She shook her head.

"Too much thick, that skull," she answered. "Maybe I crack it lil. Serve him right. You want I call police, Sanatoni?" she asked shrewdly.

"I'd rather not," he answered; and she nodded.

"We take that trash outside, then," she said. "A fine cheek they got to come along my house."

"It's my fault," he told her. "They were after me."

Whether the mate had been bent on private reprisal or was in league with Loo Fong to knock him senseless and take him prisoner was uncertain, and not pertinent now they were foiled. Tiki had balked their attempt in the beginning; Panakaloea, with her unexpected sortie, had completed the rout.

Tiki was massaging his throat, but he grinned. The fight had not exhausted him. Now that he had become attached to some one, he had shed much of his misery like an old garment. He

helped the two of them bear the sagging body of the still unconscious man out into the deserted street and set it down in the lee of a cereus hedge that topped a stone wall. There was no one in sight, no sound of the other two, and they left him there.

"I owe you a bureau, Panakaloo," said Stanton. "I owe you more than that. You came just in time."

"Ugh!" grunted Panakaloo contemptuously. "That bureau not much good. I pay four dollar for that along of junkman." She sat down and began to laugh, her stout body shaking like a jelly, her eyes rolling upward while Tiki surveyed her in awe and amazement. "Too much I fool that *kaikanaka*. My old man, the *kapitani*, one time he hit me with that club. This time I get even. When that black trash wake up he think the house fall in on him."

Tiki did not understand what she said, but he grinned widely at her tone. She insisted upon opening beer for herself and Stanton, and she gave Tiki a glass, which he tasted suspiciously and then swallowed it with a comical grimace of surprised delight as he rubbed his stomach. Native fashion, Panakaloo had strengthened the brew with a slug of Hollands gin.

It was beginning to get light when she left them, still chuckling over her prowess, vastly pleased with herself. Tiki was too proud at what Stanton said to him, patting his shoulder the while. It was Greek to the islander, but he knew it for praise.

CHAPTER III.

THE RACE TO MOTUTABU.

CHEUNG'S schooner arrived from Levuka early the next morning, mooring in the stream at first, then, as the tide served, going to a wharf remote from the main one where the Lehua still lay. Stanton did not go near her, but stayed at Cheung's house

after breakfast, at the latter's suggestion, talking with Lucy Haines. From behind the tatties of split bamboo they saw Loo Fong pass by and glance up, later to return again.

Stanton said nothing of what had happened the night before. It did not seem necessary. Cheung had gone to see about getting the schooner ready. Tiki was in his shed, waiting to be called for, smoking his new pipe, a stray no longer.

Stanton and the girl told each other something of their early life. Mention of the impending trip made her grave, brought worry to her eyes. He could tell that she was fighting off doubts of finding her father. Several times they sat silent, but not out of accord.

Cheung came back at noon and said they would leave on the ebb after nightfall. He too had seen Loo Fong. A scout he had sent out reported that they were taking stores aboard the Lehua. The skipper had gone to the hospital, Johnson was in command, and the cook had left.

"They savvy Fahine, my ship," said Cheung. "They savvy she come in. They watch all same we watch along of them. Maybe we get staht. Long way to Motutabu; Fahine mo' fast than Lehua. My captain good man. Suppose wind blow light, you leach island befo' them."

It was dark when they went on board. The Chinese skipper talked "pidgin" that was comprehensible. He found a few words of dialect that Tiki understood, to the black's delight, and sent him forward. The Chinese sailors, naked above the waist, their feet bare, their heads bound with bright bandannas, were a piratical-looking lot though their ordinary occupation was peaceful trading. But they were efficient, getting the schooner under way to singsong orders from mate and boatswain, with his whistle, as the captain showed the girl and Stanton to their quarters.

The schooner was plainly fitted up, and it smelled of ancient cargoes of copra, of *bêche-de-mer*, sharks' fins, turtle shell and pearl shell, but Cheung had evidently been at some pains to make them comfortable. There were two cabins aft for them, and the girl's, especially, had been brightened with rugs and cushions.

In the main cabin there was a rack for rifles, filled with well oiled weapons. Stanton had noted appreciatively the tall masts, the narrow beam, the clean entry and fine lines of the ship. Speed evidently counted in Cheung's business. In a rush for competitive trade or to be the first at a new pearling ground, the Fahine would not be a laggard.

She was well-found, decks clear and clean of litter, ropes coiled, the ends seized and the rigging well set up. He could hear the quick tread of the yellow-skinned sailors as they went about the familiar tasks. Soon she was under way, the wharf sliding past, the lights of Suva gleaming through the ports.

The captain came below, deferential.

"Suppose you likee go topside?" he said. "Can do."

He was in Chinese clothes, his feet shod; a muscular man with a typically Mongolian face, sure of himself and authoritative, but plainly considering them as allies, friends of Cheung Li.

The wind was fresh from the land, striking them a little abaft the beam, and they slipped fast through the water, with sheets well started. Stanton, watching the way she answered helm, surmised that her bottom was clean. She showed no lights anywhere. The captain took night-glasses from a hook in the companionway and surveyed the reach behind them. They were well out of the shipping.

"No one come," he said laconically. "You like look-see?"

Stanton took the binoculars, focused them, swept the water between them and the land. There was nothing mov-

ing there. They had got a start, at least.

He wondered if the Chinese skipper had been to Motutabu before. Probably not. But he would have its position, and the Lehua's previous trip would not advantage them much.

Their direct course was southeast, the distance something over six hundred miles. It might take them anywhere from a week to a fortnight to cover it, for the winds were variable, there were tantalizing calms and strong currents set up by the action of the tides over the varying depths and contour of the bottom, where vast expanses of shallows suddenly changed to vast abysses cleft by submarine peaks and ranges. Neither schooner had an engine. Luck or fate was going to enter largely into the affair.

They lost the land wind and ran into a calm inside of two hours, working through it at last to strike the southeast trade. The Fahine was close-hauled and clawed into it, making eight knots, slogging along at a lively clip with the sheer bows buried at every plunge. It stiffened to a squall, and the schooner leaned against it, the mainsail reefed two points, and only a small staysail forward.

Stanton was a good sailor, and the next morning proved Lucy Haines was another. All that day they sailed fast under a bright sky, the crested seas dark sapphires, save where the foam creamed or was blown in spindrift, and the sun flashed back golden from the facets of the waves. All day the horizon stayed clear of smoke or sail. The girl's spirits rose. It began to look as if the Lehua had not got away. Flying fish rose from the brine, pursued by rushing dolphins; frigate birds soared free.

THE trade set them down, and they regained their easting with short legs. They had crossed the Kudavu Passage north of the Astrolabe Reefs, passing between Totoya

and Matuku. Now there was no land in sight, would not be if they kept anywhere near their true course until they sighted the island of their quest. The Tongas were far to the north as they headed to cross the Tropic of Capricorn. The wide expanse of ocean, the run of sparkling water, the clean wind blowing between sea and sky—it was all physically exhilarating, mentally stimulating, a tonic for doubt, strengthened by the lonely horizon.

The two of them had their own mess. The rest ate Chinese food, but they were served a menu to suit their occidental tastes. Cheung's orders, no doubt. It was excellently cooked and served. Things aboard the Fahine ran like clockwork. There was never any confusion. The yellow men went about their tasks with a will the moment an order was given, without fumbling, knowing what was wanted.

It blew harder, the seas mounted, still under the blue sky and bright sun. They had to lower the mainsail at last and mount a storm staysail between the two masts, balanced by a rag of a jib. They made more leeway now. The wind remained southeast, blowing from the quarter they sought to penetrate as if it was determined to hold them off. It might have been the breath of the great gray god defending his *tabu*. But any wind was better than no wind, unless they had to run before it, and it did not come to that.

The weather modified swiftly with a blazing sunset. Stanton came on deck at midnight to find a heavy swell running, the schooner under full sail but with only a few flaws of wind that sent her forward spasmodically. The captain was aft by the starboard rail, motionless. Stanton offered him one of the cheroots with which Cheung had supplied him, and the other took it silently.

He lit it before he spoke.

"Lil time ago we see ship," he said. "All same this. Gone now. Long way off."

"You think it was the Lehua?"

"No can tell. Maybe. *Maskee*."

It was not indifference. Only the tacit acceptance of conditions, the Oriental touch of fatalism. He pointed to where a new moon hung like a nail-paring.

"Wind go soon. Maybe they get, maybe we catch. *Maskee*."

The word summed up Chinese philosophy. The equivalent of the Russian *nitcher'o*. It was not the time for direct action, save for the handling of the ship, which was the plaything of the weather. But later in the night Stanton, restless, unable to share the *maskee*-ism of the skipper, smelled incense. The captain was burning punk sticks before the joss in the gilded shrine in the cabin. He had his superstitions, or his faiths.

The next three days saw them almost motionless. The sea had gone down and was like glass, reflecting the fiery glare of the sun. Now and then they saw distant squalls, bursts of rain, ruffled patches of sea, but they got no breath of wind.

The horizon was clear again. The Lehua—Stanton held no doubt that the vessel they had sighted was that schooner, with Loo Fong aboard—might be experiencing the same conditions, or she might be bowling along out of the baffling strip.

A current was steadily setting them east. He envied the imperturbability of the Chinese; they were used to the vagaries of the sea, and accepted what they could not alter; but he chafed with impatience. Lucy Haines kept to her cabin, her meals served there. Stanton did not disturb her. She was sick, not of body, but of heart. The punk sticks burned constantly.

On the fourth morning trade clouds appeared aft, in the northwest. It was the time of the monsoon changes of wind caused by the difference in temperature between air and water. There was wind in those vaporous heights. It revealed itself in a dark line on the

water that came fast toward them as the skipper gave an order and they swung out the booms in readiness. The breeze caught them, urged them on, sailing wing and wing, the canvas bellying taut as drums, the lively sea seething all about them, a broad wake behind, on their course once more, headed straight for Motutabu.

STANTON noticed Tiki at his usual post, far forward, his eyes always turned south. He was a different looking savage from the sick creature curled up on the bale. His skin was glossy and his eyes were bright. His broad nostrils dilated as if he smelled familiar odors. Stanton wondered what he was thinking about. If the cook of the *Lehua* had spoken truly, his own island held peril for him, but there was no fear in his eyes. Whenever they looked at Stanton they held gratitude, but there was a difference, a measure of pride.

That afternoon the captain cast a light on Tiki.

"I speak with Tiki," he said. "No savvy too much, but he say one time he live along Motutabu. His father *tahunga*, all same wiza'd. Tiki all same *tahunga* himself. He speak Motutabually bad place stop along. All time too much bad magic along of big god live that place."

There was more than that that the skipper had found out by signs and certain words they both understood. Stanton retailed it later to the girl, who was again on deck.

Apparently Tiki's father had run the tribe. Tiki seemed to have been trained to take his place. Then the god had turned malignant. It was one of the deities of the South Sea pantheon that had to be placated, and the sacrifices had failed. There had been an earthquake—"Velly much shake that island," was the way the captain interpreted it. The top of a mountain had fallen off and a cape had slid into the sea. The wizard was blamed. The

population escaped in canoes, after killing the man whose magic had gone wrong. Tiki had been spared for some reason which was obscure, perhaps because of his youth or because the women hid him.

On the tribe's new home he had been suffered to live. A new wizard manifested himself. There was no god on this island. All went well save that Tiki was in bad odor. He was an hereditary *tahunga*, of an ancient line of wizards, and the new one feared him. Tiki had lived by himself in the bush, periodically hunted and sought for a sacrifice, blamed by the new *tahunga* for every sickness and death. So Tiki had stolen aboard the *Lehua*, hoping to escape to some friendlier place at which they might touch, not knowing what sort of man was in command or what kind of men were on the ship.

The curious thing was that he did not seem alarmed because they were going to Motutabu. The god was an evil god, but he believed fully in the magic of his dead father. It was the plotting of the man who later set himself up as *tahunga* that had annoyed the deity. His father had understood the god, had taught Tiki secrets concerning it. None but the ancient line of wizards dared approach it. Its shadow was death to all others.

Stanton could see no particular bearing in all this concerning the finding of Haines and the pearls. But he remembered the warnings of Cheung not to meddle with the god, and it was evident that the skipper had gone to much pains to talk with Tiki. Tiki seemed to be acquiring importance, a card whose value Stanton could not judge, though he sensed that he might have done something far more significant than he guessed when he rescued him from the cruelty of the mate. He had much to learn about Motutabu, much to learn about the god. Even now he could not quite shake off the feeling that Cheung had not spoken idly.

Strange things happened in the South Seas.

He understood it a little better with his first close glimpse of Motutabu.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JUNGLE TRAIL.

THEY sighted it at dawn. It revealed itself in the growing light, before the sun rose above the sea-line, like an image developing on a negative in the dark room, somber, gradually acquiring definite shape, a blot against the purple-black of the sky where the stars were winking out.

The skipper had found it unerringly; he told them he expected to pick it up at daylight, and here it was, darkly sinister, spray booming along iron-bound cliffs, heights veiled in mist. The sound of the surf rolled back to them as they skirted the coast to the east, seeking for some place to land. It was not going to be easy, and they held off until the light strengthened.

It came with a rush as the disk of the sun rolled up from the tumbling sea rim, day instantly proclaimed. The island woke to life. Myriads of birds rose from the cliffs and from tiny, outlying islets; gulls and gannets, squas and boobies, whirling and screeching, then winging out to sea to some shoal where they would find good fishing.

There were other birds, of the land, squawking parrots above the thick forest that verged the iron walls rising sheer from the spouting sea. Above the bush lofted three torn pinnacles, fangs that tore the vapors writhing about them. There were deep cañons here and there, dark in shadow; small coves; waterfalls, leaping to the beach over sheer precipices.

Then they saw the god. A cliff was sharply set back, and they only saw the upper part of the image, flaring livid red in the sunrise, carved, it seemed, from the living rock. It was of gigantic proportions, the art primi-

tive, so primitive it might have been the work of some futurist, striving to simplify curves and lines, to crystallize expressions.

The face was long, a long nose, flattened, bridgeless, but with flaring nostrils. A wide mouth, thin-lipped, austere, yet subtly sensual, with the hint of a cruel sneer at the corners. The eyes were carved so that they suggested a malignant glance as the crimson light blazed full upon them. The ears touched the narrow shoulders.

The body, what they saw of it, was misshapen, out of all proportion, small arms, with the hands resting on knees far apart, deep shadow between them. It stood out of the cliff in full and startling relief, infinitely evil, leering. It had a sort of crown, hewn from the summit of the cliff and the foliage back of this looked like plumes. The whole aspect was baleful, brooding, gazing out to sea like the old gods at Easter Island, whose origin and purpose no man has yet discovered.

The Chinese gazed at it stolidly. The man at the helm paid no attention and the captain was occupied with the shore line, looking for some spot where he could send a boat ashore. There was no indication of a lagoon. The island rose straight from the waves that ravened all about it.

Tiki's attitude was curious. He squatted on deck and bowed his head to the planks, in deference rather than fealty. This was his fetish, but he did not seem to be afraid. The priests of Moloch may have felt no terror at their horrible, blood-demanding image.

The girl shuddered, and Stanton had to tell himself sharply that here was only a thing hewn from lifeless stone. It glared at them and, as the morning clouds dissolved under the sun, its lips seem to quiver scornfully.

"Lifeless, I am," it seemed to say, "yet man-made from things he sensed, the brooding influences of this solitary isle, born of fire and smoke, delivered in water. Influences that may still be

conjured from the sea, the sky, the core of the earth. I represent them and I bid you beware."

Bizarre and fantastic thoughts these; but the image itself was only concrete thought. It seemed to proclaim the place dangerous, cynically warning the intruder. It appeared to hold many tragic secrets, reaching back through the centuries.

A SPUR of land, a cape like a high fin, reached out far into the sea.

As they passed it a putrid smell enveloped them. It was like the odor of a glue factory and it pursued them on the breeze until distance made it bearable. This was the stench from piles of shell set out long since to rot so that the shells might be more readily searched for pearls. The shell itself was valuable.

Here there was a deep indentation in the island, and placid water showed behind a foaming barrier of lava reef, not coral, that paralleled the shore. This must have been the diving ground for the precious bivalves. The skipper surveyed it narrowly, seeking an entrance. The reef ended presently, and he came about, hugging the land, one man casting the lead from the bobstay and chanting out the depth. It was satisfactory and the tide was with them as they glided along between the barrier and the shore, once more encountering the foul odor of decay until they tacked into the cleft and made slowly up it, foresail down and mainsail peaked, with the current.

THEY were in a somber water cañon, still in shadow, though, higher up the fanged peaks glowed in the sunrise and the timber on the loftier slopes took on vivid coloring. The ravine turned sharply and they saw a narrow beach lined with dark-green mangroves from which a stream issued. There were signs of habitation here, a long shed of thatched roof and wattled walls,

two houses of the same type. But there was no indication of life, no hail. The place lay wrapped in silence as the Fahine glided slowly on.

The masts of a vessel showed their tops above water a hundred yards out—a sunken schooner. It was a depressing sight, but Stanton twisted a measure of hope from it which he handed to the girl.

"Loo Fong didn't find the pearls," he said. "I think this means that your father is still on the island. They sank his ship to prevent his leaving."

He tried to make it convincing, and Lucy Haines essayed a pitiful smile.

"I hope so," she replied, "but why doesn't he show himself? Why doesn't some one answer?"

"They may be asleep," he said, and shouted. The echo came back from the cliff, rebounded from the opposing one. The Chinese captain found bottom to his liking, the cable slipped out to twelve fathoms, and a boat was lowered. It was impossible to tell from those yellow faces what they thought of the situation, but the rowers took rifles with them, pistols holstered at their belts. Stanton took his automatic and another revolver. He had shortened a belt for the girl and she also carried a gun at her hip.

She had dressed for the landing in breeches and high-laced boots, and she looked like a tight-lipped boy, her expression much as Stanton had seen it on the street in Suva. Tiki slid down the fall rope and squatted in the bows. The captain had given him a knife and a leather belt in which he thrust it above his *sulu* kilt.

The silence was profound. The sea birds had gone, the land birds settled down. The only sound was the melancholy cooing of doves. In the water appeared the scything fins of sharks on some mysterious patrol.

The boat grounded and the rowers hauled it beyond the rise of the flooding tide. Crabs scuttled along the shoreline. Blocks of lava protruded here and

there. Beach vines straggled over black sand.

Stanton tried to save the girl the sight of the skeletons. There were six of them, the bones scattered, picked clean by crabs, in front of the long shed. They lay in plain view, and she uttered a low cry and halted, then started to hurry forward, checked by Stanton's hand on her arm.

"There's no clothing," he said. "Your father's not there." It was scant comfort. There were a few lengths of cloth, but he thought these the loin coverings of the men Haines had with him. The grisly objects were separated as if they had fallen making a stand against invaders. The yellow men investigated as Stanton led the girl aside. Tiki looked at the skeletons incuriously.

The captain reported briefly:

"They all Kanaka. Some got hole in head. Bullet make. No white man there."

Nor anywhere else, it seemed, as they searched the shed, half full of lustrous shells; the two houses, one of which held some of Haines's belongings that brought tears to the girl's eyes, though she strove to check them. Both huts showed signs of search. The winds had erased all footprints. The shell was valuable, but it had been disdained. It looked as if the dead men had been wantonly shot down at the first encounter.

"He got away," said Stanton. "We'll find him somewhere." But he held faint hope of finding Haines alive. The atmosphere of murder and sudden death possessed the place.

"We'll stay here until we've searched the island," he said to the captain.

"Can do," the skipper answered. It seemed a stupendous, futile task. Towering cliffs, dense jungle and barren, precipitous crags, deep clefts, hidden valleys, caverns: a myriad places where a man might stow himself away, or lie dead.

They spread out, hallooing, looking in all likely spots. The captain made Tiki understand what they were seeking and he nodded, came to Stanton, took his hand and set it on his breast, starting off on a quest of his own, trotting along the beach, disappearing up a ravine choked with guava scrub. They saw no more of him that day as they searched without finding any trace of Haines, living or dead. Night fell with tropic swiftness on their utter lack of success.

THE skipper, at least, looked also for the pearls. He had his own instructions. To Stanton, the discovery of Haines was more important, even aside from thought of the girl, who had stayed beside him all day as they tried in vain to solve the riddle of what had happened to her father. Let them find Haines and, if he was alive, the pearls would be forthcoming.

The fear grew on him—he knew it grew on the girl also—that Haines had been killed by the raiders because he refused to give them up or tell where he kept them. Only the lack of a body offset this dread and a body was easily disposed of. He did not try to comfort Lucy Haines; to do that would be practically an acknowledgment there was no hope. He got her to eat on the plea that she must keep her strength for renewal of search the next day.

They slept aboard. No sail had been in sight up to nightfall. A lookout had been maintained on a cliff and, since the search had extended to the crags, they had seen the whole circle of the horizon. They had won the race down, but their advantage was checked by the search. When Loo Fong arrived, with Johnson, there was going to be trouble.

Stanton was up at dawn. He dressed swiftly, going on deck. The girl was already there, pale from a sleepless night. She was gazing at the island with an expression of hopelessness that she tried to banish as she saw Stanton.

"I'm not going to leave here until I know what has happened to him," she said, her voice firm, her mouth and chin resolute as she finished the determined sentence. He did not answer her. There was nothing to say. He was not going to let her stay alone. The question of conventions did not enter into the matter. Conventions vanished in these latitudes.

"He's all I have," she said. It was in his mind, his heart, to deny this, but it was not the time for it. Complications were likely to settle matters, not as they would have them, but as the fates willed. Motutabu lay in sunshine, but it was emphatically a savage place. The Chinese had buried the skeletons, but they were not to be forgotten. Tragedy brooded over the island.

"We'll have to arrange some sort of systematic search," he said, foreseeing how impossible was the task. An army, seeking for weeks, might not hope to unearth the secrets of the wild jungle, impenetrable in most places. The seabirds were winging out, others shrilling their morning ecstasy; fish leaped in the water while, up and down, two sharks roved as if they had tasted blood and scented more.

"We've got to eat," he said. "It's just a question of fuel."

"I suppose so," she answered wearily.

They went below and breakfast was served. Overhead the crew padded about their tasks, washing down the decks, ordinary duties that they carried on. Stanton saw two tears on her cheeks as she tried to drink the strong coffee. She wiped them away, but the drink choked her.

There was a singsong cry on deck that had a stirring note in it. Stanton thought that the Lehua must have been sighted.

"Something's happened," he said. "I'll see what it is." The girl looked at him, startled. For a moment hope flashed in her eyes and died out at the sight of his grim face. The captain

came hurrying down the companion-way.

"Tiki!" he said. "He come along beach. I think he find something."

They raced on deck. The shore boat was ready, the armed rowers in it. Tiki was at the water's edge, gesticulating, pointing to the heights. The girl was trembling as the oars bent to the short, sturdy strokes. She set her hand on Stanton's arm, and he laid his own over it. Her lips moved silently. He knew that she was praying that her father was still alive, fighting off the thought of other news.

"Call to him, please," she asked the skipper. "Ask him if—if—"

The captain stood up in the stern, handling the steering sweep, and shouted a few syllables. Tiki shouted back.

"He alive," said the skipper, and the girl broke down as Stanton put his arm about her and she set her head against his shoulder and wept in the revulsion of relief.

Tiki had found him, with his knowledge of jungle craft, looking for sign by instinct, finding it where others would have sought in vain. He pointed out certain places as they trailed him up the ravine in which he had vanished the night before. Stanton could see little. A fragment of broken lava, a snapped stem, but the savage had read all unerringly.

THEY climbed high, following an ancient path hacked through the bush, the ground hard-beaten, a relic of the time when Tiki lived on Motutabu. The trees, matted and bound together with undergrowth and vines, rose on either side like walls. Great orchids swung, brilliant butterflies hovered about them like living flowers.

They came to where the trail forked and here was a pyramid of crumbling skulls. Tiki took the right-hand path. It led to a deserted, half-ruined village back of walls of coral, in which bamboos grew along the top. There was a heavy gateway, sagging now, stilted

houses, whose roofs had decayed, the wattled walls torn by the weather, rotting from the rains.

There was a sing-sing ground with a great banyan tree, whose boughs were decked with strings of skulls. One great building had collapsed. Two stone images had fallen on their faces, tall drumlogs, carved like totem poles, lay prone. The earthquake had flung them down. The place was littered with signs of hasty, frenzied flight.

Tiki led them through this abandoned capital of Motutabu, pressing on ever upward by paths that the jungle was already reclaiming. They climbed above the forest and crossed a plateau of high yellow grass that terminated at a great rift, at the bottom of which was a lake of dark water, divided into unequal parts by a sharp ridge that led to the other side. There the crags began.

It was a narrow and perilous crossing. The volcanic rock was badly decomposed and it scaled and broke as they passed, the fragments bounding down to the still water, far below.

On the other side they came to a ledge and Tiki turned and made gestures, nodding at them, talking in excited gutturals.

"He speak we soon find," the captain interpreted.

They had to go in single file along that narrow way. Once Tiki pointed to some dark marks on the rock.

"That blood," said the captain. The girl shuddered and Stanton steadied her. It was the dry season. Such stains would linger. Haines had been wounded. Suddenly Tiki stopped where a tangle of vines cascaded down the cliff that backed the ledge. He drew them aside and disclosed a narrow cleft, a fissure made ages past in some upheaval.

It led to a little glen that was merely an oval enlargement of the fissure. Its sides were thick with moss. Water trickled down and formed a pool. There was shrubbery, a few trees, guava

scrub. The sun never reached this hidden place in which Haines had found sanctuary. They saw a little shelter of boughs by the pool and saw him lying there, gaunt, haggard, his face covered with a beard, his eyes deep sunken, but with light in them, as the girl gave a cry and ran forward to kneel beside him.

He was reduced almost to skin and bone. One shoulder and a foot were crudely bandaged. His voice was barely audible.

Stanton had brought along a first-aid kit and a flask of brandy. Lucy gave some to her father and a faint flush came into his hollow cheeks.

"I thought you were a ghost," he said faintly. "How did you come here? It was just in time. I wouldn't have lasted—much longer—my dear."

He closed his eyes and Stanton thought he was gone, but the pulse still fluttered feebly. The girl gave him more brandy.

"He's starved," she said. "We must get him down to the boat. Thank God he's still alive!" The pearls were forgotten. The Chinese captain had got a fire started. One of the crew put on some water to heat.

"We'll have to be careful how we feed him," said Stanton. "I've got some beef cubes. We'll have to make a litter, and those wounds should be looked to. He doesn't seem to have any fever."

In the hope of Tiki's discovery they had brought up certain equipment, including the utensil in which the water was warming. The girl dissolved the cubes and added a little brandy, while Stanton unbound the foot. A bullet had gone through the small bones. The wound showed in a purple pucker. There had been inflammation, but, with the fever, it had been starved out of him. The lead had passed through and there was no infection. It was the same with the shoulder. Haines was terribly weak, but he had been a strong man and he had survived.

He managed to swallow the beef tea. It was all they dared allow him. Stanton cleansed the wounds and temporarily dressed and bandaged them. The litter was being made by the sailors. Haines insisted upon talking. Stanton thought it might be better for him than repression.

"THEY nearly got me," he said. "They got my men. They'd have had me but for chance. They came early in the morning expecting to catch us all asleep, and they butchered my boys, without giving them a chance. I saw it and could do nothing. They were after the pearls. They couldn't have found them. They tortured two of my men to find out, but they didn't know. It was the Lehua. They were all in it, but it was Loo Fong who brought them. I nearly got him. It was this way—let me talk, Lucy, I haven't talked for days, not since I went out of my head.

"I wanted meat. There are goats up here in the crags and I came up overnight to get a kid or two. We were running short of grub, you see, and were pretty well fed up on fish. We were going back in a few days. We cleaned the patches and were rotting out the last of the shell. A lot of pearls. We're rich, Lucy. Luck's turned, after all.

"I saw the schooner coming in. I didn't recognize it. Thought at first Cheung had sent it. I didn't suspect anything, but started down the mountain. There's a place across the grass where you can see the beach. Time I got there, they had anchored and were sending a boat ashore. They were all like ants from the height. I saw my men come out of their hut and run back again. Those devils were armed, of course, and they didn't even wait to parley. Some of them went to my house. Then the butchery started. My boys were not armed. I had my rifle with me. I had one extra clip along. It was all over in a few minutes and

I couldn't help them. They'd have got me if I had been there. I ran down the trail when I saw what was happening and then they started up after me. I suppose they got out of one of my men that I was up here after goats. They burned the men's feet in the fire, damn them.

"One has to keep to the trails. I started back for the crags. They beat all through the grass and then they started to cross the big gap. I fired at them, hit one of them. He fell into the lake. That was a mistake, I suppose; it gave me away; but I was seeing red. On the next shot my rifle jammed. They came over and they hunted me all day, spreading out. The crew were black men and it was easy work for them. They sighted me three times. Once they hit me, in the shoulder.

"I saw they'd get me sooner or later. I couldn't stay in the crags. They had me nearly surrounded, but I got past them, down to the ledge just below here. My only chance was to bolt across the ridge. But they spotted me. They had me on the ledge. I knew who they were then. It was Loo Fong who hit me in the foot as I bolted for cover. I didn't feel it for the moment, though I had a shoeful of blood. I was bleeding from the shoulder, weak. I dodged out of sight and then I saw my last chance. I knew the cleft, though I had never been up it. A wounded dove flew into it one day and I had gone after it. I thought the vines might hide me. There was a loose boulder on the ledge and I shoved it over and dodged into the crevice. The rock went crashing down to the lake and they thought it was my body.

"They came down to the ledge and looked at the place. I heard Loo Fong cursing. They stayed there for a little while and then went away, swearing. I suppose they tried to find the pearls, but they couldn't get down to the lake. I crawled up to this place presently, bandaged my foot at the pool, and my

shoulder. They both got pretty bad after awhile. I made this shelter, I got some guavas, and lived off them and the *olehau* berries. I couldn't walk, and fever set in. I don't know how long I've been here; I was delirious."

The litter was ready. They set Haines in it, a light weight for all his big frame, and he lay there exhausted as two of the crew swung him up and they started down, Lucy as close to her father as the trail permitted.

They crossed the ridge and the grassy plain, coming to the place he had spoken of where they could see the beach and their schooner. There was another ship coming round the bend—the *Lehua*! They saw the two men left on board the *Fahine* jump into a small boat and row ashore. They were fired at from the *Lehua*. The reports came up in tiny cracks of sound, but the two reached the beach and bolted for the jungle.

A boat crammed with men put off from the raiding vessel.

They were hampered with the wounded Haines. They had to get him into safety. Stanton's blood boiled at sight of the invaders.

"We fight them," said the skipper. "Can do. If not, they sink ship, all same his." Tiki was jabbering.

"He say take him along god," said the captain. "He speak it safe place. He speak God fixee. Cave along that place."

Tiki nodded emphatically. Stanton thought of Cheung's warning, spoke of it to the captain.

"I savvy. All same I think Tiki talk plopeh."

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF THE GOD.

THERE was no time for delay. They had to do something. To take the offensive was the best plan. Tiki pointed out the opening of an almost closed jungle trail. They

went into it, going as fast as they dared, working toward the far side of the promontory, making for the image.

They came out beneath it at last, at the foot of the towering sculpture. It stood facing a paved terrace, set with flat stones. Great stones had been piled in two walls that left a passageway to the feet of the god. There was a space between his knees. Tiki led the way in.

It was a high chamber into which light filtered down from some opening above where growth masked it. The sides were roughly hewn here and there into dim shapes. There was a flat rock near the entrance on which was set another one from which protruded long timbers, capstan fashion. Tiki pointed to these.

"He say can fixee tlap so no one come in," said the skipper.

Tiki nodded, gesturing. Stanton thought he grasped his meaning.

"All right," he said. "Better send out your men to try and flank that outfit. I'll stay here with Miss Haines and her father. We'll keep Tiki."

They went out, going along the terrace, disappearing in the trees, yellow men intent on battle. The litter was set down on the cavern floor.

Tiki caught hold of one of the timbers set in the stone, motioning to Stanton who set his chest against one opposite. The girl did the same thing with a third. They heaved, without result, put out all their strength in straining effort. The stone began to turn, more readily after the first movement. There was a grating sound beneath their feet.

Tiki stepped back, grinning. Sweat covered him. Stanton and the girl were panting with their efforts, their clothing wet with perspiration. Tiki beckoned Stanton to come to the mouth of the cave and he followed him. There was nothing to see but the empty terrace, the waving woods. But Tiki was satisfied. He pointed at the great slabs before them, gesturing.

Doves cooed. The girl was ministering to her father who was saying something. Then there came the sound of shots, close at hand. Report after report, singly and scattering volleys. They were quite a distance off, but they came nearer. Then died away. Again they broke out, down by the beach, it seemed.

Then the two Chinese who had come ashore bolted out of the bush, carrying their rifles, glancing back. They looked toward the image and sped on without seeing Stanton or Tiki. Tiki grasped him by the arm and drew him in the shadows. He did not want the Chinese to enter the cavern. The girl came and stood beside Stanton.

"Father is sleeping," she said. "I heard the shots."

"We're safe, so far," he said. "Tiki and the god have set some sort of a trap. The trouble is, it may work both ways." Whatever the device was he could see that they might be besieged, held there, without provisions, without water, unless the yellow men conquered.

The Chinese were willing enough, capable enough, he fancied, though he had never seen them shoot. On the other hand, the crew of the *Lehua* were Solomon Islanders, used to brush warfare, trained fighters, a savage and blood-thirsty outfit, though the Chinese might match them there. When they took to piracy or banditry they were ruthless enough. He imagined the forces might be about evenly matched, but the nature of the ground would break the fighting up more or less into individual skirmishes.

There was silence again. Haines was resting. With care there would be no question of his recovery, but if Loo Fong got the best of it their fates would all be sealed. What would happen to Lucy he dared not consider. They could put up a desperate fight at the last, if they got a chance. There was no exit to the cave, no possible way to climb to the rift.

Doves cooed. The shadows shifted. Once in awhile they heard a distant shot. The forces were split up now, it seemed. Stanton thought of the captain's fear their schooner might be sunk, as Haines's had been. It was a very real peril. He wanted to be out in the vessel, but he could not leave the girl or Haines alone.

Tiki was complacent. He seemed assured that the god in whose belly they were hidden, would properly protect them. He had gone inside, to squat in front of one of the carved figures, passing from that to another. They could hear him chanting monotonously. He had come back to his old home again and he was renewing fealty. This had been the fetish of his father, the wizard, and Tiki was a born *tahunga*, in his veins the blood of generations of sorcerers who had served a weird priesthood to this ancient statue which far antedated their own original migration to this island.

IT was cool inside. Without, the sun blazed down fiercely. The shadows retreated as the fiery orb mounted toward the zenith. It wheeled out of their sight and the shadow of the cliff, the shadow of the image, began to stretch out over the paving between the walls of stone that shut out much of their view.

Tiki came back to the entrance, hunkering down. From some place known to him he had taken weird paraphernalia. He had daubed himself with white and yellow and black, there was an apron about his middle that was made of human hair. He wore a necklace of knuckle-bones, a skullpan hung upon his chest and his arms and legs were decked with circlets of shell and bone and fiber. He had been in his father's make-up repository, Stanton thought.

With him he had brought something that looked like a queer-shaped basket of plaited strips of pliable cane, like matting. He took no notice of them

apart, remote, droning out some incantations, watching the creeping shadow.

Stanton remembered something Cheung had said about the shadow of the god. The shadows of all sacred things, even of chiefs, were *tabu*. To walk in them was death. Yet the shadow of the god fell only at certain hours. Tiki could not have timed any attack that might take place. The combatants seemed to have lost sight of each other, hunting along the trails, hiding in the bush. But Tiki seemed waiting for something with a curious certainty. To him the god was infallible.

Stanton told himself that it was only a barbaric, colossal carving, but even as he held the thought, another came, suggesting that he should have faith. Civilization seemed now to be an unreal thing. They were back in the stone age, to which the island and its departed inhabitants belonged. A superstitious feeling possessed him, not one of fear. The shadow lengthened and still the island was wrapped in silence.

Suddenly he thought he saw the solid forest waver to and fro. The legs of the god, portals to the cave, appeared to move. A tremor ran through the ground and there was a low muttering as of thunder, a hollow rumbling from inside the cave. The girl started up and would have gone inside to her father, but he restrained her. The place might fall in.

Montabu had once flamed, been thrust up with its riven crags in smoke and steam. Lava had flowed. Now those fires were clogged, the craters choked, but, far below, the interior wrath still raged. This was a *temblor*, one of the earthquakes that intermittently shook the peaks that had been lifted from the sea. This was a slight shock. No other followed and he let her enter. Haines was still sleeping.

Tiki had risen. To him it was a manifestation that the god was pleased that a faithful believer had returned. He stood erect with the dignity of an oracle. As Stanton watched him he

took the strange basketry and placed it over his head. It was a hood that fell below his shoulders. It had trunklike appendages, two holes for eyes that were glazed by fish bladders. It turned him to a grotesque and terrible figure, like a great squid. As he moved, the wicker tentacles writhed.

Something was going to happen. Stanton felt it in his bones. Not another quake. He saw the shadow vanish, melt away, as if the sun had been veiled. Then it appeared again, sharp and distinct. Tiki's chant grew louder, ceased as there came the sound of a brisk fusillade.

Men were coming from the woods, firing back at enemies still hidden. They came into view between the walls. The Chinese captain and his men—fewer now—retreating, kneeling to take aim, then running to kneel again. They passed and, with savage yells, the black men from the Lehua burst into view, charging, Johnson and Loo Fong at their head.

Tiki sent out a yell of defiance, ululating, weird and shrill as it issued from a reeded mouthpiece in the mask. Loo Fong halted and turned, Johnson with him. They stared for a moment and then they saw the girl, who had come, unnoticed by Stanton, to the entrance. Stanton swept her aside, flattening her against the curve of the image's colossal leg, taking place himself on the opposite side as bullets came whining toward them. Tiki had seemingly betrayed them.

He had not moved. He was untouched and again he sent out that piercing challenge as Loo Fong cried out an order and the savage outfit came racing up between the walls, firing their pistols. Now Tiki stepped inside, unhit.

STANTON fired back to stem the stampede. They came leaping on. Lucy Haines fired with him and a black staggered and fell. Johnson was struck, but it did not check him. Their

bullets were entering the cave, splashing gray streaks on the rock. Stanton pulled trigger on his last cartridge, missing Loo Fong whose evil face was lit with triumph. They were on the last great slab when Tiki reappeared, sounding his whistling howl.

Stanton saw the rear half of the big slab tilt upward. The whole stone was balanced and it rose smoothly, inexorably. A gulf opened and out of it came a moaning sound like the wash of the sea, far below.

Johnson and Loo Fong were pitched forward, their faces twisted with sudden terror. The angle became acute, and they slid down, dropping their weapons, crouching, clawing uselessly. The mate pitched forward, plunged into the gap. Loo Fong made a desperate spring as he squatted there like a toad. His fingers clutched the high edge, the sill of the cave entrance, clung there.

The stone swung on, up and over in a complete revolution. Its edge smashed the fingers of the half-caste and the slab closed him in, leaving bloody smears and remnants on the threshold. There were only the black men left and they stood in a huddled mob before they broke and ran, some trying to climb the walls, appalled at this manifestation of the god.

It was the slab of sacrifice, used on ceremonial occasions where victims were demanded; set as a trap for the unwary, for meddlers.

Tiki had lured them on. He had provided sacrifice. He had appeased the long, unsated appetite of his god, and thus established his priesthood. He had saved Haines, his daughter and Stanton, but they had been bait for the victims.

He had won the day.

The yellow men were coming back, firing at the terrified blacks. The fight had gone out of the islanders. They could not battle with gods. Man after man went down, and then the slaughter swept past and out of view.

Tiki touched Stanton on the shoulder. He had taken off the mask and he went back to the moving capstan stone that had triggered the trap. They took hold of the pole and revolved it.

The grating sound died away and Tiki walked through the entrance, out on the slab, now firm again, turning to crouch and lower his head to the rock in salutation and obeisance.

A hail came from the end of the causeway. It was the Chinese skipper with two of his men. Stanton advanced to meet them.

"They all dead!" he said complacently. There was blood on his clothes and his hands, but his face was clear of all emotion. "Tiki, he fixee. All samee stone give way, I think."

It was over. Two of the Chinese were wounded, one seriously. A third was dead. The captain mentioned it casually. It was all in the day's work.

"Now we catch pearl and go," he said. "Mo' good we sink Lehua. No can take. Too muchee talk, too muchee bobbely that make."

Stanton had forgotten all about the pearls. It had probably been the prime issue in the mind of the skipper. Haines was an incident. He possessed a share if he lived, but that was Cheung's private business. Bringing back the pearls was the captain's affair, whether he found Haines or not. Stanton and the girl, Haines and Tiki, were pawns to the captain.

Cheung, Stanton fancied, was not so cold-blooded, but Cheung was an exceptional Chinaman.

They took up the litter as the rest arrived and marched back, past the outsprawled corpses of the black men, more sacrifices to the great, gray god. Haines awakened from his semi-stupor, seemingly refreshed. He would recover, though he would probably be lame. Stanton ordered him sent off immediately to the ship with Lucy, to occupy Stanton's own cabin.

"Catch pearl first," said the captain.

Haines smiled for the first time.

"I think they're safe," he said. "There in that pool over there. It is only half-filled at high tide. Moisture wouldn't hurt them, anyway. But there's a crevice near the top, on this side. They're in there, in an oilskin sack. The hole is plugged with seaweed."

They were safe, a bag half-filled with softly shimmering gems of the sea, slightly iridescent, oval, round, pear-shaped, symmetrical, a few of them pink in luster. Stanton could not estimate them, but he knew they represented a fortune. Haines fingered them.

"You can keep some of them, my dear," he said to Lucy. "A third of them are mine. We'll sell what you don't want."

"Sell all of them," she said. "They have cost too much. I couldn't wear them."

The skipper talked with Tiki, who stood apart. Then he came to Stanton.

"Tiki speak he stay along this place," he said. "He like we set up those dhum and those image topside along sing-sing glound."

Stanton looked at Tiki who walked toward him and once more took Stanton's hand and placed it over his heart. Then he pointed to the mountain, toward the god, now hidden by the cape.

The gesture, the desire, were unmistakable. He had come home. Solitude did not bother him. Later he might adventure, bring back a woman, or a dusky harem, but this was his land, his god.

He did not belong in Suva, nor on the other island from which he had fled. Motutabu was his abidingplace, as priest to the graven image.

They left him later, his wishes carried out, standing on the beach, mo-

tionless. Stanton felt that they owed him much, but he had owed a debt to Stanton for his rescue. He would have died in Suva. And he had paid his debt. He and the god.

The sunset was flaming back of the island when they made out to sea, two sunken schooners in the bay. Tiki had been presented with the stores of the Lehua, all that he selected.

The face of the image was no longer flaming as they had first seen it. It was gray now, somber but serene. From the mountain came the deep sound of a reverberating drum.

"WHAT you going to do now?" Cheung asked Stanton as they sat in the chamber over the restaurant. Haines was under medical care, a rich man, content to limp, since he could well afford to ride.

"I don't know," Stanton answered. "I'm at a loose end." Cheung smiled, nodded toward the inside rooms where Lucy Haines was talking with Cheung's wife.

"Suppose you ask missy?" he said. "These belong along you. If you like I buy them from you. Give good plice."

He took a leather sack from his capacious sleeve and poured out pearls into a lacquered bowl. They filled a third of it with milky radiance.

"You, me, Haines, all same divide," said Cheung. "These velly fine pearl. Fifty-sixty thousan' dollah. Why you not ask missy?"

"I think I'll take your advice," said Stanton. The trip back had been a happy one. He was not without foundation for the hope that Lucy might be interested in what he did and where he went.

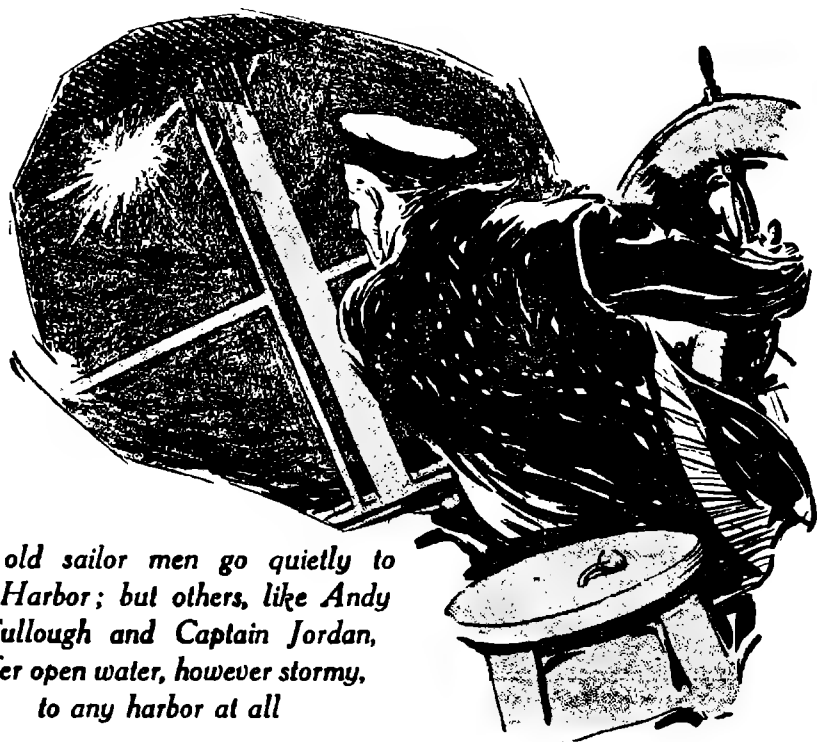
He was no longer a derelict, no longer in danger of being a beach bum. He was a man of substance.

"You ask now," said Cheung. "I call my wife. I wish you plenty luckee."

THE END.

Finished With Engines

By BERNARD J. FARMER



*Some old sailor men go quietly to
Snug Harbor; but others, like Andy
McCullough and Captain Jordan,
prefer open water, however stormy,
to any harbor at all*

THE Board of Trade inspector frowned. He was a huge, powerfully built man, and it seemed incredible that he could squeeze through the manhole of a boiler; but squeeze through he did, and with remorseless eye searched out the defects that the owners thought comfortably hidden.

"She's worn out," he said curtly, and pursed his lips at the engines so carefully tended and polished.

Old Andy McCullough, engineer of the paddle steamer *Tabitha K.*, looked anxiously at the pile of notes the other had made.

"But—ye'll renew her, o' course?" he said, with elaborate indifference.

"No," said the inspector. "I shan't." He shuffled his notes, and with a pencil went through again the

*Through the mist and darkness he spied a
vague form, low in the tossing waters*

many and various things that would have to be done to the engines and boilers of the *Tabitha K.* before he would renew her certificate.

Old Andy opened his lips to plead for his lady, then realizing the hopelessness of it stared drearily through the engine room porthole.

He had always served on the *Tabitha K.* It seemed that they were born for each other, as a man and a woman might be. When Andy was in his twenties, the *Tabitha K.* had been launched on the Clyde, and a Glasgow crew were commissioned to take her out to her owners, the Dominion Steamships Company, Toronto; and in the full flush of his first berth as chief,

he had lingered often in secret over his engines.

Double cylinder compound, they were, set inclined, working on one hundred and twenty pounds of steam with a surface condenser; and for her tonnage, she was one of the fastest paddle boats then afloat.

In fifteen days she had done the Atlantic trip, and immediately on her arrival, was put into commission as a pleasure steamer on Lake Ontario; and there she had remained ever since.

True, her excursions grew less pretentious as time went on. After twenty years she was taken off the Toronto-Port Dalhousie service, to run as a freighter between Toronto and Montreal.

Then the Dominion Steamships sold her to Dyak and Vanson, and after a few—and cheap,—alterations, she was put into commission as a ferry between Toronto and Centre Island. There she stayed, plodding painstakingly backward and forward; and with her went Andy McCullough, faithful to the lady of his youth, though her beauty was gone now and her engines wheezed more and more asthmatically each trip.

So she might have gone on till the cross-heads fell out of the guides, but for the inspector who had swept through her like an icy wind through old bones, and, searching out every worn plate and strained bolt, pronounced her sentence.

I TOLD Dyak months ago he would have to get this done. New tubes—bearing brasses—cross-head sliders—the inspector went through his list.

Andy took his gaze off the engines and moistened his lips.

"I told him myself," he said, "but he—" Andy thought of what the tight-fisted senior partner of the firm had said, and broke off. "I'll tell him again," he said lamely.

The inspector snapped his book shut and reached for his coat where it hung

on the engine room telegraph. The coat caught on the brass handle, and from "Stop" the pointer swung down the dial to "Finished With Engines." Disdaining to move it, he climbed up the engine room ladder.

"Mind," was his parting shot, "she don't move an inch till you get those new tubes in!"

Andy never answered. His eyes were on the telegraph.

"Finished With Engines."

"Aye," he said bitterly, "and finished with Andy, too."

The footsteps of the inspector died away, then silence fell.

It was broken at length by Jim, the stoker, who put his head down to say that Dyak wanted Andy at once. "And I wonder he didn't bust the phone, the rage he was in," Jim added.

Andy got up wearily and went ashore to the offices of the owners.

"How did this happen, McCullough?"

Mr. Dyak's small close-set eyes glared at the engineer as he came in. "Look—look at it!" He pointed a shaking hand to the inspector's ultimatum.

Andy spat disgustedly on Mr. Dyak's new carpet.

"Weel, I told ye."

"Told me? Why, I never dreamed things were so bad—unless that confoundedly interfering inspector is wrong."

"Oh aye, he's richt enough," said Andy.

"Well!" Mr. Dyak thumped the table with his fist. "I've been losing money on the Tabitha K for some time, and now that the Dominion Steamships have had the nerve to start a ferry on Ward's Island, why, I'm damned if I'll spend another cent on the old tub!"

Old Andy stared in amazement.

"Mr. Dyak! Ye can't mean that, sir—why, with a few repairs, she'll be good for another five year."

"Few repairs!" Mr. Dyak laughed scornfully, and the ash from his cigar

rolled down his expansive vest. "The old tub isn't worth another cent, I tell you!" He glared for a moment, then abruptly relaxed.

"Now our new boat, the Katookenay City, will make the Dominion Steamships sit up—blast 'em!"

Old Andy swallowed painfully. Well, if it had to be, it had. Perhaps the Tabitha K was old, though not so old as this tight-fisted man before him suggested.

"O' course ye'll be requirin' an engineer for the Katookenay City, sir?" he said.

Mr. Dyak looked out of the window.

"Eh, of course, of course, McCullough. Let's see, how old are you?"

"Feefty-eight next birthday, sir."

"Mm-hmm." Mr. Dyak pursed up his lips. "Old for an engineer, McCullough, very old."

"Auld, sir?" Andy's wrinkled features grew scarlet with indignation. "Ye call feefty-eight auld? Why, I'm good for anither five year at least—just like the Tabitha K."

The reference seemed unfortunate. Abruptly Mr. Dyak took his eyes from the window and frowned at the old engineer.

"To tell the truth, McCullough, we were thinking of a younger man both for master and chief—I've already spoken to Captain Jordan, of the Tabitha K, and doubtless he will communicate my remarks to you. Both of you have been in the service of the firm for—how many years, McCullough?"

"Feeften," said Andy dazedly.

"Ah, yes, fifteen. I can assure you you will be dealt with—ah—adequately."

He leaned back and took a puff at his cigar, waiting to deal with an outburst. Damned annoying business, sacking these worn-out employees.

But Andy said nothing. He picked up his cap and went to the door, and then only did he deign to look at the man who had sucked his blood and now had no further use for him.

"I would na' take a dam' cent from ye," he said harshly, and slammed the door before Mr. Dyak could reply to this piece of impertinence.

OLD Andy filled his pipe, smoked a bit and laid it down. Somehow the tobacco seemed to have lost its flavor. It was two days now since the Tabitha K had been condemned; and to-morrow a tug would come, like a conscientious janitor, and tow her, willing or no, to the scrapyard.

Andy's lodgings looked out onto the wide expanse of Lake Ontario; and from his window he could see the two stumpy masts and black smokestack of the Tabitha K, as she lay waiting for death.

Off and on, he had sat there most of the two days. Captain Jordan was his only visitor, and the two old-timers had gloomed in silence, punctuated by remarks on the personal appearance, habits, and morals of Dyak and Vanson.

On the third morning, Andy took out pencil and paper, and pausing every now and again to eye the silent Tabitha K, made some laborious calculations. The result of these he communicated to Captain Jordan, and the old-timers forthwith made a journey to the bank, and after that to the offices of Dyak and Vanson.

"So you want to buy the Tabitha K, eh?" Mr. Dyak permitted himself a chuckle of amusement. "And how much do you propose to offer for the privilege—fifty cents?"

He laughed uproariously at his little joke, and Andy, as the spokesman of the new firm, waited patiently till his merriment had subsided.

"No," he said stolidly, "roond eight hunder' dollars, we were thinkin'."

"Ah," said Mr. Dyak, and pressed the bell. "Send Mr. Vanson to me."

"Two new ship owners, Vanson," he said, when that gentleman had come in. "Want to buy the Tabitha K."

At the word "buy," Mr. Vanson's hawklike countenance grew animated. He was more like a sleek, educated vulture than anything; and it was said that when the senior partner failed for once to get the best of a deal, his junior would rave like a soul in torment till he had avenged, and more than avenged, the mistake.

"Nice little boat," Mr. Vanson said smoothly, rubbing his hands.

"Oh, aye," said his former engineer, "and ye were goin' to scrap her. I ken—verra unbusinesslike."

Mr. Dyak frowned. His joviality vanished, and he ceased to joke in business hours.

"The Toronto Dry Dock Company have offered eight hundred for her scrap," he said shortly. "Nine hundred's your price—take it or leave it."

"Eight feefty."

"Well, say eight seventy-five, considering how long you've been in the company's employ—and that's my last word, eh, Vanson?"

Mr. Vanson nodded, and more than ever resembled a vulture.

Old Andy walked to the door. "We'll be biddin' you good mornin', sir. Come, Cap'n Jordan."

Jordan lifted his huge bulk out of the chair.

"An' bad cess to you," the captain rumbled.

Andy had got to the door when Dyak spoke again. "Well," he said impatiently, "what's your price anyway?"

He had been thinking rapidly, and come to the conclusion that he could buy the Tabitha K back, dirt cheap, when the new owners went broke.

"Eight feefty," said Andy inflexibly, "as I told ye before."

"Oh, very well, for the sake of old times, eh, Vanson? Ship owners must be sentimental sometimes, I suppose."

Vanson, whose thoughts had been running in the same groove as his partner, nodded.

"For the sake of old times," he agreed.

Old Andy covered his partner's snort of indignation by saying: "We'll be fixin' up the necessary papers the noo."

TWO hours later he was down in the engine room of the Tabitha K making an exhaustive list of what repairs were really necessary, and what the inspector had imagined.

"I canna do ye so well as I'd like, auld lady," he said aloud; "but you rin awhile and Andy won't grudge ye."

The shining connecting rods beamed back at him, like a woman with a new hat in prospect, and Andy went on with his list.

"An' that'll 'bout leave us dry," he muttered. "It 'll be a close shave, I reckon."

He took the estimates to his partner, and after another anxious look at their joint bank balance, they decided to put them into effect.

"I'm thinkin' we'll have to rin her as a freighter, between Toronto an' Hamilton, say," said Andy. "She's no slick eno' yet for the tourist trade, an' the ferry concession 'll cost us more money."

Captain Jordan scratched his huge head. "She's shallow in the holds."

"Aye," said Andy, "but it 'll gie us a footin' to get her painted an' slicked up, like. Then maybe excursions at a dollar a head—Niagara Falls an' so on."

"Aye, you're right. I'll be seeing about a cargo then."

And so once more the engines of the Tabitha K were set in motion, and with her old crew—for Jim, the stoker, and the deck hands remained loyal—she plied between Toronto and Hamilton with varying cargoes.

Messrs. Dyak and Vanson watched anxiously, but there seemed no sign of her new owners going broke as yet; though, for that matter, there was no evidence of their making much money. The expenses of refitting had all but bankrupted them, and day by day the Tabitha K apologetically revealed

something that simply had to be done and made inroads into their profits.

And then one day she rammed the dock coming into Toronto! Two hundred dollars damages. And all because the wire connecting the bridge telegraph to the engine room had broken at the critical moment when Jordan was docking.

Mr. Dyak, reading the account in the paper to his partner, spoke unctuously: "Most unfortunate. Most. I expect we shall see them this morning; but not a cent over five hundred will we give. Not a cent."

But he was wrong. Neither Andy nor Jordan came to his office, and they had no intention of doing so. After a busy morning explaining to the harbor officials, the press, the dock police, they were in the bows of the *Tabitha K*, mournfully surveying the damage.

"Weel, it might be worse," said Andy valiantly.

Jordan nodded his great head. "But look at them bows," he said dolefully. "Fancy those wires giving like that!"

"Auld age," said Andy. "Just sheer bad luck. I saw we were goin' in a mite fast, an' I was thinkin' ye'd bring her up sudden like."

"An' I thinkin' how quick you always were with your throttle, an' wondering why you hung on," sighed Jordan. "Signal twice I did, and then shouted."

"Never a sound I heard," said Andy, "till it was too late. Cost us 'bout all we have, I reckon, an' those buzzards waitin' for us to bust."

Jordan raised a fist the size of a ham and shook it at the shore. "We'll go down fightin'," he growled.

"Aye," said Andy, "we'll go doon fightin'. But I reckon it 'll be a mite better if we no go doon at all." He went forward to the engine room and donned his dungarees.

His partner turned to go ashore. "The men from the dry dock will be here this afternoon," he called.

"Aye." Andy's voice came up, in-

distinct and muffled with oil. "I con-seeder—" His voice was drowned by violent hammering, and Jordan climbed heavily up the ladder.

"Buzzards!" he rumbled vaguely, and directed his gaze shoreward just as Mr. Dyak was glancing at his watch for the hundredth time and mentally dropping his bid for the *Tabitha K* to three hundred and fifty dollars.

SHE was a nice ship, the *Katookenay City*, the pride of Dyak and Vanson; and they had opened their hearts—and their purses—on her to an extent that astounded them afterward.

The last word in lake pleasure steamers, she was fitted with triple expansion engines and a screw propeller. No paddles for her! As the junior partner had said, a fast pleasure boat would make thousands out of the tourist trade; and the *Katookenay City* was making money.

Though she had been in commission only a short time, extensive advertising had crammed her full to the bulwarks each trip that she made to Kingston, and Mr. Dyak rubbed his hands with joy as the dollars mounted.

Which made it all the more unfortunate that he should have tried to save money in the engine room. After hiring and paying a first-rate skipper, he thought he had done his duty; and the men he had interviewed for chief and second engineer all wanted ridiculously high wages.

At least, that was what Mr. Dyak thought; and, rather regretting that he had not kept old Andy on—at a saving—he finally hired a man named Polson, who had meekly agreed to sign as chief for seventy-five a month and all found. Further, he was willing to find a second at similarly low wages; and Mr. Dyak, who troubled not at all about the history of Polson, and merely thought him a good engineer rendered docile by unemployment, was delighted.

Delighted, that is, until he received a curt intimation by wireless that the Katookenay City was helplessly drifting out in the vast expanse of the lake with the tail end of the propeller shaft broken; then he tore his hair and sent, raving, for his partner.

"Look! Look!" he shouted as the sleek Vanson came in. "Broken tail end! I'll have that Polson jailed! Engineer!" He broke out in a stream of unprintable language, while his partner calmly read the wireless.

"Send a tug," said Vanson curtly, who tempered his desire for dollars with an ability to see common sense.

"Tug!" The senior partner was speechless. "But think of what it's going to cost. I know those tugs—scavengers!"

He tore his hair again and literally wailed until his partner cut him short with a curt: "Shut up, you old fool! If we don't get the K-City in soon, we'll have to pay heavy compensation to every passenger. As for that engineer, I'll talk to him later."

His hawklike eyes gleamed malignantly, and Dyak, who was about to begin another diatribe on the errant Polson, cut short with a prudent, "Well, if it must be," and sent out for a tug, never doubting that the tug company would be only too eager to oblige him, at a price.

But once again fate worked against him. Eager the tug company was, but powerless to help. All three of their tugs were out, and until they came back they could do nothing.

So they told Mr. Dyak, and the fat man slowly put the phone receiver down and sank back in his chair.

"What's the matter?" asked Vanson.

His partner told him, and his fleshy face whitened.

"Get something else then," was the curt reply; but Mr. Dyak shook his head. There was nothing else to get, unless the S O S had reached some of the other lake vessels and they were

speeding to the assistance of the stricken Katookenay City. But that was not so likely as it seemed, for few of the lake boats carried wireless.

Then Vanson, too, was silent. There were some three hundred passengers on board, and if any were drowned—

"Send to Montreal," he said at last, thickly.

His partner roused himself to comply, but it was a forlorn hope. It was two days' trip from the St. Lawrence for the fastest tug, and then they would have to search for the disabled and drifting ship.

He sank back in his chair again, and the darkness fell unnoticed. Mr. Dyak's gross features gleamed whitely, wet and clammy.

"**W**HAT'S that ye say? Missin'?"

Old Andy caught the word as he was wearily passing on his way home after working all day on the engines of the Tabitha K; and the man who was speaking included him with a glance and went on with his narrative.

"... busted her tail end, and out on the lake drifting. Three hundred passengers on board—"

"What boat?" Impatiently Andy asked the question.

"Why, the Katookenay City, mister. It's on the *Tribune* bulletin. Though how a new boat like that could bust her propeller shaft!"

But Andy could give a good guess. He had once met Polson, and had no opinion at all of his abilities. "Ankle-deep engineer," he had dubbed him scornfully, and wondered how on earth he had managed to scrape his chief's papers, and, still more, how he had managed to retain them.

Other people had wondered the same thing, and Polson, after one or two shady activities during which he had narrowly missed having his livelihood taken from him, had only been too glad to fall in with Dyak and Vanson. Once aboard, his old vice had reassert-

ed itself. It was during one of his periods with the bottle that the rough handling of the engines by the second, another incompetent, that an overheated thrust bearing had caused the damage.

"Why don't they send a tug?" demanded Andy.

"'Cause all the tugs is out," said the man, and was astounded by the way Andy gripped his arm.

"Is that true?"

"Why, sure, mister—ain't I telling you? Leggo my arm!"

Abruptly Andy let go and strode swiftly off in the direction of Captain Jordan's home.

The captain was in. "The dockyard gang have fixed the bows, though they say we shall have to dry dock her later in the season," was his comment as Andy entered the room.

"Have ye no heard?" said Andy abruptly.

"Heard what?"

Andy told him the news, and Jordan whistled softly. "Adrift, hey? Well, I guess they'll send a tug."

"We're goin' to be the tug," said Andy, and straightway outlined his plan.

The skipper nodded his great head. "We'll try. Come along, Andy. I can get the deck crew, and you'll be needin' other help in the engine room, I take it."

"I've sent Jim for his brither," said Andy, "an' na doot they're already on the ship raisin' steam."

The skipper struggled into his oilskins and called upstairs to his wife: "We're goin' out after the Katook-enay City, Martha." Then he hastily opened and closed the door before he could get a reply.

"Too damn anxious about me," he confided as they trudged down to the dock; and Andy muttered something about "wummen!"

They picked up the rest of the crew on the way, and, eight all told, including the mate, arrived at the dock to find

the Tabitha K all ready with steam roaring out of her safety valves.

The skipper hesitated. "Shall we phone Dyak?"

"No," said Andy harshly. "He'll tell us we're too auld!"

Saying nothing more, Jordan went up to the bridge while Andy descended to the engine room.

"Ye've got somethin' on this time, auld wumman," he muttered to the engines; and, gleaming softly by the light of an oil lamp, they seemed to wink back agreement.

Andy glanced at the steam gauge and grunted approvingly.

"Hunder' an' twenty, eh? Keep her blowin' off all the time, Jim," he called down to the stokehold. "Is yer brither with ye?"

"Aye, aye, Mr. McCullough," and Ned, Jim's brother, showed himself, naked to the waist, his powerful shoulders rippling in the lamplight.

The telegraph rang sharply: "Slow Astern."

Andy eased the throttle back. The shining metal rose and dipped and rose again. The paddles threshed the water, and the Tabitha K backed slowly away from the dock and out into the lake.

"GOIN' to be dirty weather," muttered Jordan to himself, as he peered through the glass windows of the wheelhouse. The wind was rising, and the waters of the lake were being whipped to an ugly white foam, while the Tabitha K, broad as to beam as she was, showed an ever increasing tendency to roll. And with each roll the paddle boxes hit the water, *smack! smack!* throwing unequal strains on the patient engines.

"Hope to the devil she'll stick it!" muttered Jordan. His thoughts went to old Andy, sweating away in the engine room, and his lips parted in a grim smile.

Somewhere out in that vast waste of waters, seven thousand two hundred and sixty square miles in area, was a

helpless pleasure steamer, crowded with holiday folk, drifting no one knew where; and here they were guiding a craft thirty-eight years old to the rescue!

No wonder he smiled; and no wonder his eyes were anxious as he searched the horizon for the red stars that would spell the end of their hazardous search.

Flares; they would be certain to have flares and rockets. They were part of every ship's equipment; yet the *Tabitha K* had been out three hours now, and they had seen no sign.

Off Peter Point the *S O S* had come, as he had found out, and she might drift ashore there. He shifted the wheel a couple of points and stared, sleepless and unwearying, into the darkness.

Meanwhile Andy in the engine room was maintaining his side of the partnership with methods all his own. True to his promise, Jim and his brother kept the steam pressure topping the 120 mark; and all Andy had to do was to keep the engines turning. But that was enough for two men, and they carried no oiler.

He apostrophized the engines in a steady monotone:

"Now then, anither r-r-revolution—just to please auld Andy. Ye w'u'dna' be lettin' Andy doon, now w'u'd ye, gal?"

"Three hunder' souls, there are, somewhere oot in that dirt, an' it's you, auld wumman, what's goin' to bring 'em in."

Clank—clank—clank—the main rods rose and fell, steady, unending, inevitable, like fate itself.

The light from the smoking tallow in Andy's hand gleamed fitfully on the polished steel. With swift, certain touch he twisted the lubricators on the main rod big ends; and the great cranks, seemingly indifferent, bowed and nodded at him with the inane persistence of toy mandarins.

Abruptly Andy's voice rose, roaring

like a battle-cry above the spasmodic beat of the paddles.

"Did ye hear what he called ye, gal? A worn-out old tub! Ye'll no stand for that? You show him! Ye're tight an' richt in yer boilers, an' auld Andy's with ye. We'll show the swine!"

Clang—clang! Sharply the telegraph rang, and the indicator dropped to "Stand by," then rose again to "Full Ahead."

Like a flash Andy was under the guards and standing by the throttle.

"Praise be to God, we've found her."

HIS thick legs straddled firmly on the bridge, Captain Jordan watched the rocket rise, burst, and fall in a chain of lurid red stars, and signalled to the engine room. Then he opened the sliding door at the back of the wheel-house.

"Myers!"

The mate appeared and cupped his ear to catch the words shouted above the screaming of the wind. "Send flare—get ready—catch—tow-rope."

Out of the mist and darkness he spied a vague form, low down on the tossing waters. The darkness closed, swirled, and revealed again; another minute showed the Katookanay City rolling heavily in the seas.

Her navigation lights were out; not a gleam showed. Only cutting her, like a scimitar, every few seconds was the quick flash-flash of the Peter Point light—a warning of the treacherous rocks beyond.

Jordan bore in steadily, and moment by moment the violence of the gale increased, doubling and trebling the chances against his shipping a hawser.

The seas brought the two vessels together with a rush. The *Tabitha K* rose high on the crest of a wave, her paddles screaming; and below Jordan could see the stricken ship settle like an inert log. Then *crash!* down came the *Tabitha K* into the trough, and the old timbers groaned with the shock.

"Must get in quick," he muttered.

Hand on telegraph, he signalled the engines down to "Slow." The Katookenay City receded suddenly, swept past, bobbing, her human cargo falling forward like specks of white on a crashing chimney.

Round again Jordan brought the Tabitha K working her right in with consummate mastery, so close that he could see the straining eyes on the bridge of the Katookenay City as the Peter light flashed past.

"Hawser!" Jordan bellowed through the megaphone. The gale tore the words and flung them away before they had gone two feet, but there came an answering bellow: "Think—you—can stand—" The rest was lost, but Jordan understood. They were wondering if the Tabitha K had the power to maneuver herself in the storm, let alone tow another!

His lips tightened, and he threw back his magnificent head like an old and ferocious lion roaring defiance at its captors.

"Line!" he thundered, and whether or not his words reached the Katookenay City he never knew. Bringing his craft up, he turned, and the Tabitha K came back sliding down the seas like a parcel down a chute. There was no mistaking his intention.

A figure separated itself from the white faces for'ard. A line twirled, rose in the air, fell short into the boiling waters. And the Tabitha K went by, her stern shaving the bows of the Katookenay City so close that it brought an involuntary exclamation to the lips of the pleasure craft's captain.

Old Jordan jangled the telegraph, and with a muttered imprecation brought the Tabitha K round again.

DOWN in the engine room Andy stood by the throttle and valve gear, one leg twined round the heavy iron stanchions, his eyes fixed on the telegraph dial.

"Ahead" — "Stop" — "Astern," the bell jangled continuously. Seventy

signals Andy counted before the indicator flashed to "Stand-by," then "Slow Ahead."

The hawser was caught by a deck hand and made fast.

"Now, gal," Andy muttered, and gently his hand moved forward. The paddles threshed the water. The hawser tightened. On deck, the crew of the Tabitha K stood by to ease away if the strain was too great.

"Full Ahead."

The thin black thread whipped the water like a taut banjo string and the two vessels rolled and pitched in unison, while the paddles of the Tabitha K screamed and rattled with futile wrath, striving to make headway with that vast, inert weight towing at her stern.

Low and tender, like a mother talking to a child, Andy coaxed the straining rods.

"Now, gal, just for auld Andy—anither r-r-revolution. Ah, I feel her comin', comin'—ye'll no give up, gal? Go doon fightin', an' auld Andy 'll go with ye. We'll show that buzzard! 'Finished With Engines,' eh? Fight, auld wumman, fight! Laugh in his face, an' show him the fightin' spirit ye have!"

The skipper of the Katookenay City wiped his wet face, and his eyes alternated between the ominous lighthouse flashes to starboard and the tossing outline of the Tabitha K.

"God, they'll never do it," he thought, and watched the straining cable rise and dip in the seas—rise and dip and grow taut again.

"We'll have to cut loose," he muttered. "It's too much for her."

He was about to give the necessary order to the mate when again he felt that forward lurch. And this time there was no mistake. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the Katookenay City ceased her helpless rolling, and like a wounded duck, trailed along in the phosphorescent wake of the whirling paddles.

The first round of the battle was won.

AFTER that it was a question of whether the *Tabitha K* could hold together till they got into Cobourg, the nearest harbor. Old as she was, the seas had started her seams, and with her ancient engines rattling and banging on their bed-plates, it seemed that any minute she would go to pieces.

The pumps were kept going continually, and Jordan, red-eyed and sleepless on the bridge, wondered if they had succeeded in getting the hawser aboard only to have two hulks drifting back helplessly onto the rocks.

As for Andy, he groaned at the destruction going on. Their paddle boxes were smashed, and the paddles, naked as the web of a spider, tossed water in cascades over the decks as the buckets swept round.

A bucket broke away with a splintering crash, and the little vessel poised in her flight, like a bird shot in mid air, then plunged on with a shuddering smash, burying her nose in the dirt.

"For Gawd's sake, stick it, auld wumman!"

Andy coughed in the choking atmosphere. Steam was hissing in vicious jets. The smell of hot metal was overpowering. Water streamed through the sides, in cascades, in ever-increasing floods. It slopped sluggishly over the engine room floor; and there was a furious hissing from the stokehold as it reached the red-hot grate bars.

A face raw and red from the wind appeared at the engine room ladder.

"Leave her, boys, she's sinking!"

"T' hell with you," said Andy valiantly, then shouted through the stokehold door: "Oot with you, Jim, an' yer brither—she's goin', lads!"

Jim and his brother came out, black from head to foot.

"Come on, Andy."

"Aye, lads, after you."

They disappeared up the ladder, and

5 A

old Andy stood by his throttle. His lips moved, but no sound came forth. Still the main rods rose and fell, but slower and slower.

"Weel, auld wumman, we'll go together. We've no fought sae bad, eh?"

The cranks nodded at him, bowed, and disappeared into the blackness of the crank pit.

"Aye, aye," said Andy, as if they had answered him. "But I'm main sorry for the passengers on yon craft. I hoped ye c'u'd ha' made it, lass—"

The water was up to his knees now, but he never heeded. His eyes were on the telegraph "Full Ahead."

"Hi, Andy, Andy! Curse the pig-headed old son of a gun!"

Captain Jordan clumped heavily in his sea boots and glared down the engine room ladder. "Come up, Andy, dang ye—she's goin'."

There was no answer, and grumbling to himself, the skipper clambered down the ladder, and came on the inanimate form of his engineer washing sluggishly at the bottom. Puffing and blowing, Jordan heaved the unconscious man on his shoulders and staggered out on deck.

DAWN had broken, and a strange sight showed in the cold gray light. On either side were the black outlines of the breakwaters of Cobourg Harbor, and resting on the bottom lay the *Tabitha K*; while behind her, still attached to the tow-rope, was the *Katookenay City*, floating peacefully in the calm water.

Her masts were gone, her bulwarks smashed, and her bridge a ruin. But her damage was as nothing to that of the *Tabitha K*. A steam hammer could not have wrecked her more effectively. Her top deck was awash, and above the ruin of her superstructure her black smokestack, like a banner of triumph, tilted rakely to port.

Jordan lowered the unconscious engineer into a waiting boat, and the passengers lining the sides of the *Katook-*

enay City, broke out in a storm of cheering. It seemed incredible that the battered wreck before them, half covered with water, could have towed them to safety.

But towed them she had, and Messrs. Dyak and Vanson, ferried out to the Katookenay City as soon as they reached Cobourg, gazed in dumb wonderment as they passed the rakish black funnel that marked the last resting place of the Tabitha K.

Mr. Dyak, more nervous than his partner, had been through hell in the last seven hours; and as he learned that no lives were lost, the dirty gray pallor of his face slowly gave way to its accustomed red.

"Ah," he said in relief, and regained enough of his self-confidence to be ready to harangue the engineer Polson.

But he need not have troubled. When they went down to the cabin of the chief engineer, they found him lying in his bunk—and he would never have to face the board of inquiry..

"One of the finest exhibitions of seamanship I have ever seen," said the captain of the Katookenay City as the three stood on deck after watching the last of the passengers being transferred to the shore.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Dyak, "and the crew of the Tabitha K shall be adequately rewarded, adequately. What's that you say, Vanson?"

HE turned to confer with his partner, and listened with growing gloom to something that vulture-headed gentleman was saying.

"I'm sure you're wrong, Vanson," said Mr. Dyak, and inflated his cheeks. "Why, McCullough and Jordan are old friends of ours. We let them have the Tabitha K for next to nothing."

Some twenty-four hours later, recovered from his experiences, Andy towed his partner into the offices of Dyak and Vanson.

At once Mr. Dyak jumped up with ecstasies of welcome.

"Well, Mr. McCullough! Well, Captain Jordan! Sit down, sit down, my partner and I were just talking about you. A marvelous piece of seamanship. Marvelous, marvelous—" His voice trailed off and he continued rubbing his hands together.

Mr. Vanson said nothing.

"Oh, aye," said old Andy.

A pause, then the senior partner went on: "And one that shall not go unrewarded. No, sir! There's nothing mean about Dyak and Vanson." He paused impressively. "We intend paying you the purchase price of the Tabitha K, and you, McCullough, will fill the billet of chief on the K-City, when she's reconditioned. Captain Jordan will be master on one of the Dominion boats. We have negotiated successfully."

"Ah," said Andy dryly, "then ye no think we're too auld?"

"No, no." Mr. Dyak laughed a bit nervously.

"Weel," said Andy, "I'm afraid we'll have to disappoint ye. We still intend to continue as ship owners."

Mr. Dyak coughed. "But surely want of capital—"

"No," said Andy calmly. "I think there'll be capital eno' when the courts award us salvage."

"Salvage!" Mr. Dyak raised his hands in horror, while his partner's features grew more vulturine. "You don't mean you're claiming salvage? It would ruin us—ruin us!"

"I dinna think so," said Andy. "There's many a copper in your stocking yet, sweated oot o' sailormen. Incidentally Malcolm Randall, the lawyer, was on the Katookenay City. Ye've heard of him, na doot? Weel, I've seen him, an' he's minded ta be grateful. I no think we shall ha' trouble in collectin' the salvage. I'll be wishin' ye good mornin', for the present. Come, Cap'n Jordan."

THE END.



Craftily Bamjee wrote his name in pencil on the toe of Siva's image

Asoka's Alibi

*Brahmin plots, and a fanatic, drunk with the love of death, beset
Quorn and his elephants, as carnival-mad Narada, on the
Indian border, seethes with secret schemes*

By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Ho for London Town!" "When Trails Were New," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

QUORN, formerly a Philadelphia taxi driver, has been elevated—by chance, his love of elephants, and a wild ride on the back of the run-away Asoka—to the post of keeper of elephants for the Ranee of Narada.

Narada, a border region, is seething over the tradition-flouting deeds of the nineteen-year-old Ranee, and the Brahmin priests are plotting to overthrow her power. Blake, the English resident, sides with the Ranee, as does Rana Raj Singh, an independent Rajput prince with a handful of danger-

loving followers. Quorn worships the Ranee next to his mighty Asoka, and he strives, during the mad carnival month of April, to keep the minds of the populace centered on his elephants and their antics, rather than on the Ranee's disregard for the ancient ways.

Bamjee, a *babu* who sides with whoever is most munificent, likes Quorn; and warns him that the priests of Narada have brought in Maraj, prince of killers—a disciple of the old Thuggee, the Thugs; he kills for the Brahmins now, or—a refinement on mere

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murder—makes his victims commit suicide, and so damn their souls to wander forever.

As Quorn rides Asoka from the carnival, a whirling fanatic hurls his snakes in the elephant's face, and is trampled to death. Quorn knows it was a Brahmin trick, for now Asoka will be condemned to death—so he rides wildly out of town, and performs the miracle of hiding his elephant. Coming back, he enters the palace, and warns the Ranee. Rana Raj Singh places himself and his men behind Quorn, in an attempt to prove the connection of Maraj and the Brahmins.

Blake takes Quorn toward the Residency, where a fugitive is safe; but on the way, Blake's servant is killed, and Quorn, investigating, is spirited away. He finds himself in the power of Maraj; and that worshiper of death advances hypnotically on him, and commands: "You shall obey me!"

CHAPTER III (*Continued*).

THE ART OF THUGGEE.

QUORN lay still. He was thinking elephant. How did he manage Asoka when the fits of frenzy seized him? Let him run—offer him no opposition—hang on and wait and pretend to be one with him, seeking the same goal with the same wrath. Pretend to encourage him. Get him to use his strength against some obstacle that did not matter. Get him to exhaust himself, and at the first chance get him to believe he had done all his havoc by request. It had worked all right; the tantrums were fewer nowadays. Something of the same sort might work now—maybe—a bare chance—worth trying.

"Hell!" said Quorn. "What's all the yawp about? Do you kid yourself you're tough because you kill a few poor suckers? Yah! You don't know what tough is! You should see 'em where I come from."

"You mistake me," said Maraj. "I have been where you come from. Toughness has nothing to do with it. The tough ones die the easiest. They love life and they dread death, though they think they don't. They dread passion; therefore they are its slaves. I love passion; therefore it is my slave, even as a woman who is properly loved is the slave of a man."

"Aw, hell! That's talk. I've heard 'em on a soapbox handing out a better line o' yawp than that—bolshevists and such like. Show me. Talk don't mean nothing. I can't teach a guy to drive an automobile by singing songs to him. I got to show him. Show me. I won't believe a word of it until you show me."

All the East asserts that there is no such thing as luck, yet Quorn had stumbled on something that the men of science labored for a century to find—and doubted then. To save his soul he could not have analyzed it or have put it into plain words. What he knew, by the change in the maniac's eyes, was that he had touched off something that might presently give him the upper hand. He had gained time. He had flattered cunning. Cunning proposed to magnify itself before it had its climax.

"Why not show you? Knowledge increases suffering. Suffering is cruel. Cruelty is the delicious essence of all nature. It is essence that I seek. I find it daily. Do you understand me? Essence."

"Hell," Quorn answered, "any fool could understand that, Essence? Huh!"

"You are ignorant, but I will teach you. Ignorant men don't suffer much, not even in this world, under torture—although I know tortures that are exquisite, and I will show you several. Suffering increases as the square of knowledge. Do you know what that means? The suffering of this world is as nothing to the infinite agony provided in the next. Those who suffer genuinely here take with them an in-

creased ability to suffer. They add to the hell—to the hell—to the hell! Do you understand me? Spiritual, mental, infinite, eternal hell! Ah-h-h! So I shall show you. I will teach you. You shall not go forth in ignorance. You shall be a delicious morsel for the spiritual fiends of torment. What does this life matter when you have eternity in which to revel in the blistering, nervous dissonance of death?"

"It don't matter a damn—not a damn," Quorn answered. "That's an easy one."

"Where is your elephant?"

"I can find him for you any time. Say, all you've said is talk so far—lower grade stuff. You've got me interested, but you haven't proved a thing. I saw you kill that sucker, but, hell—that weren't much; I could have killed him myself with half a brick. You show me something A-1—genuine magic. I'll name the stunt—you do it. If you win, I join your gang. How'd that be?"

"You will be my disciple? You will yield your soul to me? You will try to learn what I shall teach? Hee-ee! That would be amusing. You will go mad, but never mind. What do you wish me to do?"

"I'll set you an easy test. Put one over on them temple Brahmins. Put it over on 'em good, mind. Trick 'em—trap 'em—show 'em up—bring shame on 'em—reduce 'em to a common joke. Then set yourself in place of 'em—me under you. I'm game if you are. The folks say I'm Gunga *sahib* come to life; that ought to make it easy if you have imagination. Maybe you haven't—you haven't showed me any yet. How about it?"

THERE was a long pause. Maniac imagination thrilled itself with ecstasies of vision—Brahminism going the way of all things mortal, only in an agony more awful than any sane man could invent. Watching the maniac eyes, Quorn played his trump:

"'Fore I'd reckon you worth learning from, I'd have to see you out from under them temple Brahmins' influence. Hell, they've been giving you orders. They've been claiming they protect you. Yah! I'm not the thousandth o' what you are, yet I wouldn't let that gang claim they was protecting me. I'd show 'em different. You show 'em where they get off, and I'll join you, elephant and all."

Maraj looked keenly at him. Quorn's face was as innocent as any actor's. The blind spot that is in the brain of every maniac, however supernormal his intelligence may be, permitted vanity to smother cunning.

"You'd better let me go and get my elephant," said Quorn. "Come with me if you like," he added, noticing a sudden constriction of the irises of the madman's eyes. "Then you make all the plans, remember. This ain't my problem, it's yours. I'm yours if you work it out right. Anything you say, I'll do, barring that I don't have to kill nobody until the temple Brahmins quit, and fire a lee gun, and haul their flag down. Get me? After that I'll kill as many as you say."

"Tell me," Maraj leaned over him again. "Do your wrists hurt? Does the cord cut your ankles?"

If the East is right and there is no such thing as luck, perhaps luck is a form of genius. Again Quorn stumbled on the key to freedom, though he paid a high price.

"Yeah, it hurts fine. I like it," he answered.

"Hee-ee! You do? You like it? Try this. Is it exquisite now?"

He knew where to touch the nerves that carry torture to the brain. Quorn writhed, but the lamp threw shadow on him. Maraj had rolled him over on his face. Quorn's quivering and grunting might be masochistic ecstasy.

"You will do, you will do for a pupil," said Maraj. He cut the cords; Quorn almost sobbed with the relief. "That is not a bad beginning. I can

teach you. You shall learn that pain is the only pleasure. Go now. Go and find your elephant."

"Are you coming with me?" Quorn asked.

Sudden fury seized the maniac. "You witless idiot!" he shouted. "Who are you to dare to question me, your master? Do you think I need to watch a fool like you? Can you escape me? Try it! Go before I—"

He made a gesture as if to produce the handkerchief with which he could kill with such consummate art. Quorn staggered to the door, in torture from his rope-raw ankles. It was locked. His wit deserted him; he could not imagine what to do. He glanced at the glass lamp on the beam. With his ankles in that shape could he jump up from the box and smash the lamp, and take a chance in darkness? He decided he would try.

He had gathered his strength for the spring when he heard voices. Something on the outside struck the door. He heard the hinges give. He saw Maraj spring, swinging for a moment like a monkey on the beam—spring like a monkey again and break an opening, feet first, through the thatched roof. Blake burst in then—Blake and half a dozen servants. It was like a dream.

"Here you are, eh? Hurt much? Had a hard time finding you. Hello—who's dead? Well, I'll be damned—another murder, eh? Oh, look out there—catch Quorn, or he'll tumble. Lay him on that sacking."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BABU AND THE BRAHMIN.

RATS are credited with instinct that enables them to leave a ship some time before it sinks. Bamjee had perhaps evolved beyond that animal characteristic without losing the desire to practice it. He was as fearful and as fearless as a rat—as full of cunning

and as energetic—as suspicious and as keen on testing information for himself. What he lacked in actual intuition was compensated by peculiar alertness.

He was not at all afraid of venturing so near to a trap, or even into one, that a sneeze or a sigh would have snapped the spring. But he was difficult to catch. And being an incredulous, irreverent, observant rat he understood the ways of temple Brahmins—which is more than quite a number of the Brahmins do, since, like the rest of us, they are, generally speaking, lazy and accept as truth much untruth as their seniors believe it wise to tell them.

"My God!" said Bamjee to himself, when he had shed the palace finery and once more held his silken pants leg as he flitted through the palace shrubbery in quest of secret foothold on the palace wall. "My God! If she should order that cursed auditor to tell the truth about me—Krishna! Women in authority are worse than men. They are more cunning. They are willing to let themselves be cheated, so as to have you by the short hair. And they hang on—dammit! Dammit! Dammit! On the other hand, should she lose her throne, this *babu's* job is gone. The auditor would see to that; I should have paid that scoundrel a better percentage—maybe—maybe—but beggars on horseback ride you down. To hell with them. And if she wins this battle with the Brahmins she will probably dismiss me anyhow and try to find an honest man for my job. There aren't any. She will ruin herself learning that the honest men are too big fools to be trusted. But that won't help poor Bamjee. This *babu* must climb on fence, part hair in middle for balancing purposes and be ready to jump kerplunk into the arms of either side with nuisance value well established."

For a beginning he climbed the palace wall in total darkness, leaving his pants inside the palace grounds. He did not propose to go home yet, partly

from fear that his movements might be traced. It might not matter if they were traced, but—

"If I should choose to qualify the truth a little, it might be awkward if some liar knew where I actually went. I can do my own lying, thank you. And it costs less."

So he found a small storekeeper who owed him money and who felt flattered by being aroused from bed by such an important personage. To him he told a long yarn about having been stripped by thieves—

"And if it were known that such bad thieves lurk in your neighborhood, where there is only your shop and a few stables, you might find yourself in bad with the police, who would come and search you—and you know what that means! So you had better say nothing about it."

He bought several yards of cotton cloth and dressed himself native style. He also bought a cotton turban, wrapping the silk one carefully around his body underneath his shirt, and into that he tucked his remaining money.

"Now perhaps I can venture homeward without being robbed," he remarked to the storekeeper; and having started homeward because he was sure the storekeeper would watch him out of sight, he made a circuit and went hurrying in the opposite direction.

His goal now was the Pul-ke-Nichi—the long, narrow thoroughfare on the far side of the city, that dipped down between two mounds, on which the temples of Siva and Kali stood, connected by an ancient bridge. He had no fear of not finding Brahmins awake.

"Two things would wake them anyhow," he told himself, "the chink of money; and the least little whisper of smelly, secret news—they love it."

HE was tired to the bone, but he solved that problem. To the pious horror of the temple Brahmins the Ranee had recently installed a modern hospital in that part of town

in charge of a young Sikh doctor, who was nothing if not keen on getting cases. There was a motor cycle ambulance, and a night bell.

Bamjee rang the bell, gave a false name and told circumstantial details of an accident. He offered to show the way to where the victim was, and the doctor decided to drive the ambulance himself; his presence on the scene, instead of the ignorant ambulance man, might save the victim's life.

So Bamjee lay in comfort in the ambulance while the doctor drove at full tilt through the city, missing the legs of sleeping men by inches, clearing the way with his horn and breaking all the rules of even reckless driving with a confidence in destiny and disregard for risk that would never occur to any one except a Sikh intent on winning laurels for himself.

And in the dark trough of the Pul-ke-Nichi, where the bridge cast pitch-black shadows and there were too many sleeping nondescripts for even a Sikh to take that chance of killing some one, Bamjee stepped out of the ambulance to find the supposititious victim—

"Compound fracture of both thigh bones, doctor, and the ribs of both sides—one arm broken also, and perhaps internal injury—a very interesting case."

That was the last the doctor saw of him. He slid into a shadow and followed it beside the ponderous wall of Siva's temple.

There he was challenged. Two men in yellow robes ran out and blocked his way. They scurrilously mocked his glib confession of sinfulness and a desire to meditate on the omnipresence of death in life and life in death. They called him a casteless miscreant, who might go and mock his lady mother on a dung hill. So Bamjee was obliged to change his method.

"Business," he whispered, "with the high priest! You are undoubtedly 'twice born,' both of you, to make you twice as stupid as you look, but you

had better tell the high priest Bamjee is here. Yes, Bamjee! Yes, Bamjee—the man who caused your temple to be defiled with Johnson's Jubilee Germ Exterminator! Bamjee with a message for the high priest—sounds important, doesn't it?"

There was whispered consultation. One man took the message and the other stayed. There followed prickly silence for a space of fifteen minutes, broken into irregular intervals by the impatient honking of the Sikh doctor's horn, until the messenger returned.

Bamjee was to be admitted—not into the temple, but into the cell across the courtyard in which virtually unclean visitors were sometimes as an act of mercy, blessed through a hole in a wall of the temple basement. So he was soused with water that had been treated by incantation, hustled across the courtyard along a row of flagstones that were also immunized against the tread of ritually unclean feet, and thrust into a bare stone chamber. Bamjee shuddered as the door slammed shut behind him and he heard the bolt slide home.

"Oh, my God!" he said. "What a man won't risk to save his neck!"

On three or four walls little lamps were burning, leaving the door in shadow. In the wall that faced the door there was a round hole, showing that the masonry was ten feet thick; the hole was trumpet-shaped, its small end inward; Bamjee did not dare to examine that very closely until he had blown out two of the three lamps and adjusted the wick of the third.

"But they will hardly dare to kill me," he reflected. "Nobody knows I was not seen to enter here. Phuh—death is an unpleasant topic—let me think of something else."

HE examined the stone chamber. There was no window. He could hear nothing except his own blood surging in his veins. He crept close to the wall and peered very cau-

tiously into the trumpet-shaped hole, but could see nothing; it appeared to be closed at the far end. However, presently he heard a shutter slide in iron grooves at the end of the hole in the wall. A voice spoke angrily, complaining that the lamps were not properly lit in the chamber. Another voice offered to send an attendant to light them.

"No, but discover whose fault it is. Impose a heavy penance. Go now. Close the door."

"Is that the most holy and reverend twice-born confidant of gods and treasurer of wisdom who presides over all the Brahmins of this temple to be an example to men and a blessing to the world?" asked Bamjee. "Humbly then I kiss feet. Humbly I ask blessing."

Through the hole came the mumbled perfunctory formula. Then:

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"All-wise, I am Bamjee bearing bad news."

"Because, for the sake of your pocket, you defiled this temple, you are doomed for a thousand lives to be a blind worm in the belly of a dog!"

"I know it! I know it! I sinned and the sin is on my head. (*Dog of a Brahmin! Humble am I? You shall pay for it!*) But may I not commence to purge my sin? (*Purge your own, you old tyrant!*) This *babu* has had sudden change of heart. Some god has probably observed what wrong this *babu* did (*You old devil, I'd like to drown you in a tub of sewage!*) and stirred an impulse to do better and to make amends. Oh, Most Wise—*Muddle-head*—if this *babu* has wrought evil, you yourself will do worse evil unless you give him opportunity to make compensation for his ill deeds! Am contrite! Am able to do valuable service. Am, above all, ab-so-lutely bent on telling truth and nothing but truth. Pity me and listen!"

"You shall be heard."

The shutter squealed back into place along its iron grooves and there was silence again so almost absolute that Bamjee knew he would go mad if it should last long. He could hear the noises in his head that are so quiet and so intimate that we are unconscious of them until real silence stimulates hearing and imagination invents mysterious reasons for them. Silence is no sedative. It arouses self-analysis. But in Bamjee it also aroused a saving sense of humor.

"Yes, am rogue undoubtedly. Am that sort of person. But it takes *all* sorts of persons to make a universe, and I did not create myself—unfortunately. Had I done so this poor *babu* would be billionaire—most estimable personage, with lickspittles by the dozen to say to him, 'Yes, *sahib*' and 'marvellous' and 'such high-mindedness'! Instead of which, even these rascally Brahmins dare to call me a low-minded nasty crook! No, this *babu* did not build the universe. Not guilty! And by Krishna, who is a legend, and by Ingersoll and Bradlaugh, who lifted themselves by the seat of the pants in order to prove there are no such things as miracles, these noises in my head will give me religion unless I watch out! Ah!"

Somebody was coming. The door bolt rattled. Bamjee was himself again, and by the time the door opened he looked like an idol made of hardened india-rubber, squatting with his back against the wall.

"Such hospitality! Such courtesy!" he exclaimed. "You have a mat for yourself, I see. Bring two mats. This stone floor is not salubrious to sit on."

The partly opened door slammed shut again.

"High priest is one thing," Bamjee remarked to himself. "High priest's deputy assistant walking alibi is camel of a different smell. Noose that would neatly fit neck of high priest would not make finger-ring for expert alibi. Must use ax—verbally that is—plus irritant.

An irritant deputy assistant alibi is good—as ginger under horse's tail—will kick his master into difficulties. Now then—"

THE bolt rattled again. A temple servant entered, threw a mat on the floor and walked out. Bamjee spread the mat and sat on it, resuming his look of molded impassivity.

A Brahmin entered, well fed, rather athletic-looking, haughty, with the self-esteem derived from a monopoly of wisdom, carrying his sacred mat under his arm. He spread the mat as far away from Bamjee as he could and sat down, muttering incantations calculated to preserve him from contamination.

"I kiss feet," Bamjee murmured with almost as much perfunctory insolence as the Brahmin conveyed with his answering, equally formal, blessing.

"You are a spy," said the Brahmin.

"I am," said Bamjee. That admission rather took the Brahmin's breath away. He blinked perceptibly. There was a long pause. Presently: "You have the impudence to try to spy on us?"

"Have No. Had? Yes. No further need. Have found out what is necessary. Business of bargain now."

"Miscreant! Who would bargain with you?"

"Any sort of half-wise, sanctimonious sweeper of crumbs of sanctity who did not want to pass up any wise bets."

"Do you know what happens to fools who are disrespectful to the Brahmins?"

"I know what happens to Brahmins who shut their eyes to opportunity. They are just like other people—only more so. Esteeming themselves higher they fall harder and it hurts worse. This *babu* is versed in several theologies, including atheism and relativity—perfectly familiar with theory that all is illusion and nothing provable. Am possibly a hypothetical assemblage of imaginary atoms, saying nothing to

nobody in a vacuum abhorred by non-existent nature. Nevertheless, you kid yourself you are somebody very important. Self, am pragmatist with positivistic tendencies that tell me your fall from your high place would hurt your imaginary feelings more than my fall from my low place could hurt mine. So you had better get down off that high place. It is much more comfortable down here."

The Brahmin scowled. Special sanctity can endure all inflictions except ridicule.

"Concerning what do you wish to drive a bargain?"

And now Bamjee showed genius. He knew he had pitted himself against a system—a morass of metaphysical influence that could swamp any individual as surely as stone age swamps yielded and smothered the mastodons' strength. He who would prance upon swamps requires agility and wit. Metaphysics must be met with metaphysics; bludgeons are no use whatever.

"Lost in mazes of speculative philosophy, this *babu* seeks something to which to cling—something that somebody else thinks is solid, even if it isn't. If we are all kidding ourselves, why not do it in easiest possible way. You may be right. Your teachings may be right. If they are wrong, it doesn't matter, and if they are right then the sooner this *babu* accepts them the better, not only for me but for you also. If it is true that you have power to bless and curse, I buy blessing! With money? No. Money is imaginary and evasive symbol of gross materialism—much too difficult to get—and of no importance to one of your sanctity. This *babu's* services, however, are for sale, also without money payment. In other words, with swap. My definite and dangerous deeds in this world, against your hypothetical assistance in the next!

"Am, like English Prime Minister Balfour, an honest doubter, doubting own agnosticism and afraid of consequences—if any. Shamelessly, there-

fore, will sell to you, in this world, now, if there is such a thing as now, all secrets of Her Highness, the Ranee, insofar as they are known to this *babu*, together with this *babu's* allegiance—in exchange for forgiveness of past offenses and recognition as eligible candidate for perferment in after life, if, as, and when. Something for nothing—maybe. But your nothing may be something after all. If so, I want it."

"You speak like a man possessed by devils."

"Many devils. Mad ones. Some so devilish that if you refuse to accept my repentance and to put me on favored waiting list of applicants for spiritual bliss, I will certainly be much more devilish and instead of working against the Ranee, I will work against you. Instead of telling you what I know about her, I will tell her what I know about you. In other words, if I can save my soul, I will; but if I am to be damned, there shall be no more damnable enemy of sanctity, living or dead, than myself. So now you know. Forgive me, bless me and use my services—or look out!"

"Blessedness can make no bargains."

"**T**OO bad. Blessedness will wish it were cussedness before I have finished, in that case. I am not afraid of you in this world. It is the next I am thinking about. You can, of course, detain me if you wish, and I know there are dark dungeons somewhere, into which inconvenient enemies of Brahmins vanish. Oh, yes, indeed. I even know where those dungeons are. And I know the names of individuals who have vanished into them. But I did not come here alone, and if I fail to reappear within a certain time there will be reprisals."

"Liar! You came in an ambulance. You gave a false name to the doctor who brought you. You are a servant of the Ranee and an accomplice of that impostor Quorn, who calls himself the

Gunga sahib. Quorn—even at this minute—is meeting the fate he deserves. You? For you, what evil destiny is bad enough?"

"Oh, well, no use talking to you. Let me go," said Bamjee, covering his agony of fear under a very well-acted cloak of indifference. Cold sweat was bursting out of every pore in his body and he felt sick at the stomach, but he looked belligerently insolent.

The Brahmin rose, rolled up his mat and made a signal on the teak door, rapping with his heavy finger-ring. The door opened and the Brahmin stood back to let Bamjee precede him.

"To your doom!" he remarked in a strange, startling voice. "Never enter this temple again!"

"Sanctity first!" said Bamjee with a mocking bow of abject reverence. He waited. The Brahmin waited. At last the Brahmin shrugged his shoulders, began murmuring a *mantram* nasally, like an angry swarm of hornets, and led the way out.

His signal, it appeared, was misinterpreted. A long stick, swung with strong hands by a man who hid beside the wall on tiptoe, came down like a pole-ax on his shaved crown. It broke the stick. It cracked his skull. A second stick, from the opposite side of the door, descended on him before the blood had time to burst through the broken skin or his knees had time to give beneath him. Then he fell like a steer and his blood went pouring on the paving-stones.

The apparition—the white, whirling specter that seized half the broken stick, leaped over the body and dived into the darkest courtyard shadow—was Bamjee. One of the men beside the door gave chase—until a shadow leaped to life and the point of Bamjee's broken stick so nearly disemboweled him that he rolled in silent agony, his knees on his chest. Somebody shouted to the men on guard to close the outer gate. There was a clash of chains, the hinges squealed and the gate shut with a clang

in Bamjee's face. But it was pitch-dark by the gate. None saw him.

"Seize him!" a voice shouted.

"Too late—too late!" came the answer. "He escaped us."

CHAPTER V.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

ONE reason why Brazenose Blake had been picked for the post of British Resident in Nerada was his genius for official inertia and strictly unofficial action. He could be incredibly indiscreet and get away with it.

A more meticulous observer of precedent and the proprieties would have sent for the police. Blake searched the dead Brahmin's clothing, asked Quorn all the questions he could think of, left the Brahmin's body lying in the hut and took Quorn to the Residency, where, the moment he arrived, he sent a galloper in search of Rana Raj Singh. Then he gave Quorn a carefully measured dose of whisky, personally rendered first aid to the tortured wrists and ankles, bit the end from an expensive cigar, sat down and waited, with his feet on the veranda rail.

"No use getting excited," he said. "You've twenty minutes, Quorn, to lie still and remember all that happened. When Rana Raj Singh comes, you can tell the whole story to both of us at the same time. Save breath and exertion."

So Quorn fell asleep, which was exactly what Blake intended, and when Rana Raj Singh came thundering down the lane at last—only a sound in the night—black suit, black boots, black beard, on a black horse—and drew rein like a landslide at the front door, Quorn had recovered to a point where he could tell his story almost as it happened. But his account of Maraj was understated; he was afraid that if he told the whole truth, and described the

maniac whose picture had been burned into his brain, neither Blake nor Rana Raj Singh would believe a word of it.

"That's all," he said at last. "The next best thing is for me to get back to Asoka before he busts loose and comes looking for me. He's liable to look good. He knows he's only got to shove down a wall to see what's t'other side."

But Blake had not finished yet. "I found this," he said, "on the dead man's body." He unfolded a slip of yellowish paper and passed it to Rana Raj Singh. "Will you read it to us? Do you mind translating it?"

Rana Raj Singh carried the writing to the lantern that hung from a hook on the porch and studied it, stroking his beard, looking almost like a disembodied phantom because the unusual black suit that he had put on shaded imperceptibly into the darkness, offering almost no outline. Then he strode back.

"Temple jargon," he remarked. "A sort of slang in shorthand that the Brahmins use for confidential communications. It appears to me to mean: 'M'—that may stand for Maraj—'bungled elephant affair. Faquir killed uselessly, since no rioting occurred and Quorn escaped on elephant. Find M and tell him he must finish Q'—that is Quorn, I suppose—'or coöperation must cease.' I suppose it means they intend to denounce him unless he kills Quorn. It might mean that. I can't think of anything else it could mean."

"Cinch," said Quorn abruptly. "You keep that, sir, and let's pretend I have it. Them Brahmins 'll try all the harder to get me, and we'll trap 'em that much easier."

He watched Blake fold the piece of paper in his wallet. Then he turned to Rana Raj Singh: "Maraj ain't far off. He's as mad as Nebuchadnezzar the king was in them Bible times. But maybe they didn't teach you about Nebuchadnezzar, sir. Anyhow, he's mad, and he's got it all set in his mind

to make a devil out o' me. So if you watch me you'll get him easy. But that won't get them Brahmins all compromised up with him the way we want. My thought is, sir, that madmen maybe are like any other kind o' mad critter—one idee at a time but covered awful cunning, so it maybe looks like just plain random cussedness, whereas it isn't. Get me?"

"This guy's got it in his head to prove himself superior to Brahmins on all points. He's all set to take a fall out o' that gang that run Siva's temple. They've used him for a heap o' dirty work and me, I heard that dead guy threaten him. They mean to double cross him whenever it suits 'em, and Maraj, he knows it. What's more, he figures two can play that game. So the Brahmins have it in for him and me; he has it in for me and the Brahmins. The Brahmins want to get me first and then him. He wants to get the Brahmins first and then have a good time turning me so crazy that even Satan 'u'd feel jealous. 'Tain't worse than a crossword puzzle. We ought to be able to work it out."

"The thing to do," said Rana Raj Singh, "is to follow you and kill him the first moment he shows himself."

"You'll pardon me, sir, if I talk back?"

Rana Raj Singh nodded. Blake bit another cigar, scowling. All three listened for a moment to a noise outside; it was difficult to guess where it came from, but it might have been close to the compound wall, a hundred yards away.

"If that is Maraj," said Rana Raj Singh, "I expect we have him."

Ten of my men followed me. They are rather good at approaching a place silently."

"'Twould be a sin to kill that sucker and let them temple Brahmins get off free," said Quorn. "I'm mean about 'em. Maybe it ain't good manners, sir, to mention your young lady, but she's

my employer. I think such a hell of a lot of her I'd take a long chance for her sake and I've no sort o' use for swine that 'u'd try to make her kill a decent elephant. I'd go the limit—and there ain't no limit—just to down her enemies and leave her sitting pretty. I know her as good as anybody does. She'd say, 'Take all chances, Mr. Quorn, and let's win this! Don't let's have another drawn game?' That's what she'd say. Can't I get you, sir, to see it that way?"

Rana Raj Singh's white teeth showed in a slowly widening smile.

"I am afraid you have my promise, Mr. Quorn. You may command me. I obey!"

Before Quorn could think of an answer to that a peculiar whistle—high C, B, C sharp—thrilled out of the darkness not far off. Then a horse tripped on a stone and stumbled. Rana Raj Singh answered the whistle, vaulted the veranda rail, leaped on to his black horse and was gone like a galloping ghost.

Suddenly: "What's that, sir?" Quorn asked in a low voice.

"What?" demanded Blake. "What d'ye mean? Where?"

Any man's hair would have stood on end, and his blood run cold. The end of the veranda was some fifteen feet away, screened by woven wire and hung with creepers. Lamp-light, streaming past the edge of a carelessly drawn blind, made a fan-shaped, milky opalescence in which a tangle of wire and creepers were clearly visible.

Something as irresistible as destiny was tearing that tangle apart—opening it, as curtains are opened down the center. There was hardly any noise. Then, in the midst of the opening, full in the lamp-light, grinned a face—a human face, inhuman as a nightmare.

"God!" cried Blake. "Who is it?" He mastered himself. He had no weapon. He forced himself up from his chair, and the face vanished. Blake strode toward where it had been, and

stood there staring at the broken strands of wire and of creeper that would have been difficult to cut through even with an ax.

Quorn watched him—until a hand came through the veranda railing and seized Quorn's leg in a grip that checked the flow of blood. It checked speech, paralyzing like the cold-iron grip of nameless fear.

Then the face of Maraj came up out of the dark—and the lips of Maraj smiled upward—and the eyes of him gleamed at Quorn. They were like an animal's and Quorn knew they were watching Blake alertly even though they stared so straight into his own eyes. Then the lips moved and a voice that was hardly a voice at all, and yet that carried as distinctly as sounds carry in dreams, said:

"Get your elephant and meet me—"

There was no time for him to finish. Blake was turning, starting back toward his chair. Horses were coming—clattering, cantering, scattering stones, making as much noise as Raj-puts always do when they are done with ghostly silence. Quorn felt the blood flow again as the grip ceased from his leg.

"Thought we had him," said Rana Raj Singh, vaulting from the saddle and throwing his reins to a man who galloped up from behind him. "One of my men saw him, another heard him, but he gave us all the slip."

He was here not a minute ago—there—at the end of the veranda," Blake said. "I distinctly saw him."

"Hell, I felt him!" said Quorn. "Look at this." He held his leg toward the light and drew his trousers up to show the marks where the maniac's hand had gripped. "He ain't far off."

Rana Raj Singh whistled all his men and there began a hunt amid the shrubbery that had fair to lay Blake's garden waste. Blake ran to the other end of the veranda and slammed a window shut, then ran into the house and

locked it on the inside. As he came out he slammed the door and turned the key.

"Fine howdy-do if she should bolt into the house!" he remarked. "Why haven't I a dog? Goldarn it! Never again will I live without a decent dog. Why, even a terrier would—"

HE vaulted the veranda rail and vanished into the darkness to help Rana Raj Singh and his companions search the shrubbery. Quorn heard the click of the Colt revolver that Blake had brought with him out of the house.

"Too bad if they get him yet," he muttered. "We've a first rate chance, if we use it right, to teach them Brahmins a lesson they won't forget—not in *her* time."

He sat considering the Ranee and his duty to her, wondering whether it was possible, in these democratic days, to be the benevolently autocratic ruler that she aspired to be. He knew there are more than a hundred different kinds of government in India, ranging from a theocratic despotism to the fringes of fascism and socialistic experiment.

"Tyrannies, all of 'em," he muttered. "Maybe she can do it." He spoke louder than he realized—and suddenly he almost leaped out of his chair.

"Of course I can!" a voice said quietly behind him.

It was the Ranee herself, in riding breeches. He jumped to his feet, but it hurt his ankles, so he leaned against the railing.

"No, you are not dreaming, Mr. Quorn. You talk aloud so often to your elephant that you think aloud when you are alone. It is dangerous. And those others all talk at the top of their voices, which is foolish; but people are ruled by being foolish, not by any wisdom in their rulers. Have you heard of Haroun-al-Raschid—and Peter the Great—and Amir Abdurrah-

man? Each of them was his own secret service. I follow in their footsteps, in some respects.

"Do please be seated, Mr. Quorn. I came when I learned that Rana Raj Singh had been sent for, and I have been listening. Maraj was within three feet of me—he even touched me without knowing it. Mr. Blake looked straight at me through the hole that Maraj made in the trellis. How blind men are unless they know what they are looking for! I heard what you said. Have you anything to tell me that you haven't told those others?"

"Yes, miss! You go home! This ain't no place or time o' night for pretty ladies with a throne to lose! Who came with you?"

"Nobody."

"No guards nor nothing? I'll be sugared! The President o' the United States can't move around without he's watched, and he's supposed to live in a safe country. Prince Rana Raj Singh—what will he say?"

"We will soon know," she answered. "I hear him coming."

Blake came up the steps to the veranda. Rana Raj Singh caught sight of the Ranee in the lamplight and vaulted out of the saddle over the veranda rail. His gesture as he stood before her was inimitable, blended of an Old World courtesy, a lover's privilege, anger, self-control, a sense of outraged dignity, and hopelessness of ever teaching her the elements of common sense. But he was too steeped in dignity to reproach her in Quorn's presence.

Blake had less compunction. "You?" he said. "At this hour? Have you come to claim protection? No? What do you suppose my government will think of a queen of your age who runs such personal risks in darkness? Don't you realize your enemies will represent—"

Her musical answering laugh disarmed him. "I came for sport!" she said. "Politicians are fogeys, but is

there any need to lecture Mr. Blake on sportsmanship? Rana Raj Singh is another story. Listen!" She laid her right hand on the Rajput's. He seized it and the slumbering fire in his dark eyes leaped into passion, but he subdued that.

"When your ancestors in Rajasthan went forth to war," she said, "who held the castle? Women! When your ancestors were slain in battle and the enemy laid siege, who defended the castle? Wives and sweethearts! If a woman had not held your castle against the Mahratta hordes, she ever in the front rank of the fighting, until her son was born and the Mahratta army gave up the siege in weariness—would you be alive to frown at me to-day? You talk to me, and rightly and proudly you talk to me, of the ancient deeds of Rajput men and women. Would you have me something less than they were? This little war we wage against the Brahmins of Narada—is it something that should make a coward of me? You—on whom I count to help me make my throne a power and my people free!"

He bowed dramatically, with a hint of half-grudging good humor. Not yet officially recognized as even her future consort, he was hardly in any position to restrain her. Besides, her logic was not answerable. Logic is exasperating stuff, which women never use unless they wish to defend their illogical intuition. Rana Raj Singh stiffened himself, a grim determination to stand by and face whatever consequences she might bring down on himself and herself simply bristling from him.

"Danger and death are nothing. It is how we die and how we meet danger that counts," he remarked.

"This is neutral territory. Let us talk things over amicably and make a good plan," said the Ranee.

"Neutral be damned!" Blake muttered. He had his eye on a shadowy perpendicular pen-stroke in the darkness—nothing more important than the

pole on which, by day, the British flag was raised. He wondered how many treaties and laws were being broken, using his neutral veranda for a jump-off place in a raid on Brahmins.

"AFTER all," said the Ranee, "it is me they are after. Quorn and Asoka are pawns they think they have to take before they catch the queen. I wish I knew where Bamjee is. I might send Bamjee to the temple with misinformation that should cause those Brahmins to trap themselves. Bamjee is crooked and unreliable, but I can depend on him to do the wrong thing at the right minute. If you know what somebody will do, then you know yourself what to do. But where is Bamjee? No, he didn't go home. I often have Bamjee watched; it pays. But he didn't go out through the palace gate, so the watcher hunted for him and found his trousers lying near a place where an active man could climb the wall. Bamjee is up to mischief."

"So is Asoka, miss, I'll bet you!" Quorn retorted. "I hid him good, but he won't stay hid long. He has hay enough, but he'll miss me and he'll miss his warm cakes. Folks with long noses like his have a way o' getting so darned inquisitive that rope won't hold 'em. And the rope weren't none too up-to-date. Rats had et some of it. How will I get to him? I can't walk."

"Do you think Maraj would follow if you should go on horseback?" the Ranee asked. "I heard him order you to get your elephant and meet him. Did he tell you where to meet him?"

"No, miss, he was interrupted."

"He is very likely listening to us now," said Blake, leaning out over the veranda rail to peer into the night.

"No," said Rana Raj Singh. "We have searched every bush and shadow. He escaped, but my men are watching. Not a rat could get past them. He may be lurking outside their circle, but he is not inside it."

"Very well then. Somebody give

Mr. Quorn a horse," the Ranee ordered. "Let it be a tame horse, one that he can sit on even if he can't ride. And let somebody give him a big white turban and voluminous white clothing, so as to make him unrecognizable. Be sure you shorten his stirrup leathers—otherwise a child would see through the disguise. Let Mr. Quorn go to his elephant and two or three men follow him on horseback at a distance, taking care not to appear to follow him. If they are half wide-awake, they may capture Maraj. If the Brahmins are watching Quorn, some Brahmins might be caught, too. If we had the luck to catch Maraj alive, and two or three Brahmins as well, and lock them into one room—and listen—"

"Don't trust luck. Luck is always with your enemy," said Blake. "Two or three men—could they take that many prisoners? It might take more than three of them to hold Maraj, even supposing they could catch him and tie him."

"I will follow Quorn," said Rana Raj Singh, "and I will take eight men. Let the others be your escort to the palace. It is no man's business to ask me whither I ride at any hour, day or night, so if any one asks—"

"Take all your men," the Ranee interrupted. She looked appraisingly at Blake. "Would Mr. Blake mind riding with me to the palace?"

"Honored. Shall we go now?" Blake answered promptly. He wanted her out of the residency before some spy should recognize her and send secret reports to the Central Government that might keep him writing explanations for a twelve-month.

AND if this plan fails us?" asked the Ranee.

"Which it will," Blake interrupted. "But it's a good plan, because it sends you back to the palace out of danger."

"If it fails us, there is this: the Brahmins are sure to send a deputation

to me in the morning to demand the execution of Asoka and probably, too, the dismissal of Mr. Quorn. I shall refuse, of course, and that will make them far more irritated than they are already. I will publicly arrange to send Asoka to the old hermitage beyond the river. That will be a challenge to them; they claim the hermitage as theirs, whereas it isn't. I will ride Asoka to the hermitage, and I will ride rashly without my soldiers. That should tempt the Brahmins to occupy the hermitage and to attack me on the way, or to cause others to attack me, as is more likely. Rana Raj Singh will provide them the answer to that!"

Suddenly she turned to Rana Raj Singh—touched his hand again. "You and I have quarreled, because I rode from my palace at night, unattended, to the residence of Mr. Blake, who is a bachelor! You are leaving me—riding away in disgust with all your men! I will spread that story. All Narada shall have heard it by to-morrow noon. So you shall be a surprise to the Brahmins. Watch Quorn—keep yourself and your men under cover—let Mr. Blake know where you are, so that he can find you or get a message to you without any one suspecting you are in secret touch with me." She smiled at Blake. "Everybody knows that Mr. Blake would never stoop to interference in local intrigue, so no one will suspect him—not even his government."

Blake winced. Smoking in a powder magazine is a sane, safe and comfortable form of self-preservation in comparison to overstepping the bounds of diplomatic privilege in India. However, he who coined the motto "safety first" forgot that safety is the enemy of all adventure and of all things new, as well as of the ancient virtues such as chivalry.

"Oh, damn!" said Blake. "Well, go on. What next? I'm in for it."

"Each to his task," said the Ranee. "I go home. If any of you happens

to see Bamjee, don't be too rough with him, but send him to me at the palace. Good night, Mr. Quorn. I hope your ankles and wrists will soon get well again." Suddenly she remembered she had made Quorn her special agent with full authority. "Is the plan all right? Is it a good one?"

"Yes, miss. Good as any other, I guess."

"Very well then, it stands. Mr. Blake, shall we let them ride away before you take me to the palace?"

Ten minutes later she bowed to convention enough to let Blake hold her stirrup while she swung into the saddle.

Less than thirty seconds after their backs were turned—almost before the lamp-light ceased to gleam on their horses' quarters—Blake's office window was gently raised and a man stepped out on the veranda. One of Blake's servants saw him, started after him.

The man waited and the servant rushed him. The man stepped aside. A silken handkerchief flickered almost too fast for human eyes to follow and the servant fell face forward, separated from his life as if electric energy had drawn his very nerves into itself. He did not move. He made no sound except the thump of falling. For a second the owner of the handkerchief stood on the rail of the veranda, holding to an upright, listening. Then he leaped into a shadow and was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE FEET OF SIVA.

SIVA'S temple stands on Siva's breast, which is a hill. Kali is the dreadful bride of Siva. Kali's temple stands on Kali's breast, which is another hill.

An ancient bridge unites the two, and underneath the bridge the Pul-ke-Nichi runs—a narrow street between the hills, a few feet higher than the level of the temple basements, which

were excavated century by century until the hills are like honeycombs and no man—except certain Brahmins—knows the secret of the interlacing tunnels or how deep the dungeons lie in the foundations below the basement and the courtyard level.

Nobody knows what happens in the dungeons, or has happened in them. Certainly Bamjee did not know, although he had boasted to the contrary. He only knew that the courtyard where he stood was almost at street level, but between him and the street was a teak door, possibly a foot thick, that exactly fitted a ponderous arch and frame of cyclopean masonry. There was no escape by that route.

Crouching like a rat in the shadow he listened. He heard the gatemen say he had escaped. He heard them reprimanded, heard the order given to keep the gate locked until morning—worshippers were to be told to enter the temple by the small door on the far side of the hill. Bamjee's problem was to get into the temple, in which there was never an hour of day or night that did not see somebody, and normally a number of people, meditating or clicking rosaries and chanting *mantrams*. From the temple he could walk out through the small door unobserved.

There were two chief difficulties, of which the more immediate was the danger of crossing the courtyard. There was no guessing how many temple attendants lurked in the pitch-dark shadows; it was a hot night and every one off-duty probably had spread his mattress under the stars.

"And such dogs sleep with one eye open," Bamjee muttered.

However, it had to be risked. Another difficulty was that he had dressed as a low-caste nondescript who had no business within those sacred walls. A caste-mark did not matter; that would be invisible at night, but the huge white turban and the flowing cotton garments were a problem. He had to solve that first.

He remembered the silken turban he had coiled around his waist, and the thought of that reminded him that he still had money tucked away.

"Could buy a high priest if I had enough," he muttered. "How much have I? It feels like five hundred rupees. I remember the time when that much would have bought me five times over. I was always better than two Brahmins. That is therefore ten times too much for a Brahmin's honor. He must therefore throw in something. Courage, Bamjee-bhai! If you can escape from this place there is no reason why something besides dirt should not stick to you. I think those gate-men have gone to sleep."

He could hear one of them snoring; of the other he was not so certain. However, he contrived to strip himself stark naked without making any noticeable sound. Then he bound the silken turban on his head and, timing the sound to the snores of the sleeper, he tore the cotton sheeting until he had enough to make one simple loin-cloth, which he wrapped around his waist. He could now pass for a Chattrya, who had a right to worship, but no right whatever except in a certain section of the temple set apart for non-Brahmin suppliants for Siva's notice.

So far, so good. But to reach the tunnel leading to the winding stairway, hewn out of the rock, that led upward to the temple floor appeared impossible. He could dimly see shadowy forms of men sitting in groups in the courtyard. He could hear the murmur and drone of their conversation. It would be impossible to get by them unnoticed, nor did he dare to risk losing himself in any of the other passages and tunnels whose dark openings loomed like ink-blots in the night.

HE crept toward the courtyard until, on his right, he could see the flight of steps leading to a parapet from which, he knew, the bridge stretched over the street toward Kali's

temple. Kali's temple would be worse than Siva's, as far as concerned getting out of it; its priests were not on speaking terms with Siva's priests, whom they regarded as loafers lacking discipline and zeal.

But Bamjee knew that the parapet, and the bridge beyond it, as far as the midway barrier erected and protected by the rival priests of Kali, was a zone where idlers often broke the temple rules unknown to their superiors.

It is not alone in Christian churches that the devil incites the sanctified to shoot craps in a vestry now and then; the critics of Christianity have problems also. Bamjee, seeing that the moonlight streamed down one side of the steps and left the other half in darkness, tiptoed silently along the shadow by the wall and climbed in search of sinners *in delictu*.

"Luck," said Bamjee to himself, "is a hole in the roller of God that otherwise crushes us. I have found one or two in my day. Maybe I find another now."

He did. There were no card parties, such as he hoped for; no surreptitious singing of immodest songs; no drinking—nothing of any blackmail value, until he peered around an image of the temple god, on whose impassive shoulders scores of pigeons slept, and saw a woman, who shrunk herself into a niche in the masonry, weeping. Never a man met misery with greater pleasure.

"Woman," remarked Bamjee, "I disagree with you. It may be you are all he said you are, and worse, but you are not the most desperate person. I am he. I, too, am made incredulous of the divine because I rashly trusted a disciple of divinity. What shall you do? I don't know—until you tell me what the matter is. First you shall tell me your sad tale, then I will tell mine. Thus we may help each other."

She was a pretty, soft-willed little woman of the sort that any rascal can seduce with words that ooze romance,

and she had given all she had to somebody, no doubt of it.

But like many another little fool, she had seemed so foolish that her sanctified betrayer had dared to warm his vanity at the flame of her admiration by revealing secrets to her that he thought were safe in her simple mind, and now she only asked for sympathy to make her bubble them all forth, the last first, in the order in which they crowded memory.

She had not depth enough of grief to be ashamed; she was only sorry for herself. First come, first served; if she had known that Bamjee was an expert at uncorking secrets, she would have told hers nevertheless. She simply had to talk.

"A little cash," said Bamjee to himself, "applied at the proper moment, in the right way, heals all the smarts of ignorance. It is only knowledge that is incurable." So he applied the cash.

He pointed out to her how money pays for care at the Ranee's hospital; and he told her of the Ranee's school of industry where women became self-supporting and were protected from rapacious relatives, so that even lawful husbands could not claim them and collect their earnings. Such talk was like a fairy tale, but the hundred rupees that she clenched in her hand were true enough. So she told the truth, too—first the name of her seducer, then his temple rank, and then, to match those wonder tales of Bamjee's, one by one his secrets.

"And he will come for you? He will come for you here?" asked Bamjee.

"Oh, he must. He will come to get rid of me when he comes off duty. I can't get out of the temple without his help."

SO Bamjee waited, getting her to tell the tale again until she grew suspicious and, having told it all twice over, suddenly decided to be secretive. Bamjee knew exactly what to do with that mood.

"If you say one word more I will ask the Ranee not to admit you to her hospital and to her school after your baby is born. From now on, silence! If you speak when the priest comes, I will tell him what you have told me."

It was late—hardly an hour before sunrise, when the culprit came: a shaven, well-fed, healthy Brahmin, with a long nose and a mouth less cruel than irresponsible. He did not see Bamjee, who had perched himself up on the arm of Siva's statue, disturbing numbers of pigeons that came back and slept on his shoulders. The Brahmin began upbraiding the woman, resuming a conversation where it had been interrupted when he went on duty in the temple:

"How should I know that the child is mine? And if it were, what of it? Do you know how great an honor is intimacy with one of my caste? Do you know the penalty for bringing a Brahmin into disrepute? Do you know the law against adultery? Do you know what your husband can do to you if he suspects that child is not his own? And do you know the penalty for trespassing within this temple? Do you know the sin of ingratitude? Do you know—"

"Do you know who I am?" Bamjee asked him. When he moved he disturbed the pigeons, so that up there on Siva's arm he must have looked amazing at the first glimpse; the Brahmin's imagination may have clothed him in other-world emblems of association with the gods. The Brahmin put the palms of his hands together and touched his forehead. Then he knelt with bowed head.

Bamjee stepped on to his head. He rapped his forehead smartly against the stone work. Then he squatted, and when the Brahmin looked up it was at Bamjee's platinum-rimmed spectacles.

"Who are you?" he demanded then, angrily, aware that he had made a fool of himself. Perhaps he suspected that Bamjee was the woman's husband.

"Point is, I know who you are," Bamjee answered. "I know what you have been doing and I know what you are going to do."

Recognizing Bamjee as any rate not of Brahmin caste, the Brahmin resorted to the insolence that is the essence of the pretensions of his breed. "Dogs now and then bark at their betters, but—"

"But the betters avoid being bitten sometimes," Bamjee answered. "One thing you will do, when I am ready, is to guide me and this woman from the temple."

"Oh, is she your woman?"

"The whole temple shall know she is yours, at the top of my lungs," said Bamjee, "her lungs also, probably—unless you swallow your impertinence and listen. You will do exactly what I tell you. Otherwise you shall be known as a Brahmin who has defiled himself—and much more also. The Ranee shall learn all about your plans. Oh, yes, I know all about them. No, no, you cannot immure me in a dungeon—not for many minutes. It is known where I am. I am not at all afraid of being caught in here. I am a spy! Yes, certainly, a very good one. And I don't mind telling you who pays me: a committee of the merchants of Narada! What for? They are weary of the Ranee. They desire to know whether or not you Brahmins are concerting action against her. If so, they will be very generous to the temple treasury, but if not—"

"If not, what then?" the Brahmin demanded.

"Never mind. I know your plans now. They are good ones."

The Brahmin sneered. "You have learned them from that fool?" He glared at the shrinking woman as if eyes could burn her up. Not even the dark shadow of the overhanging statue prevented the woman from seeing and feeling his wrath. In another moment she would have denied having told anything, but Bamjee forestalled her.

"I have said I am a good spy, oh, person of small intelligence!" Bamjee was itching to get away, but he betrayed no trace of it; he appeared willing to talk until after daylight.

"Would a good spy listen to a woman? To a woman with a grievance? I have been all night listening to the twice-born groups of holy chatters who sweat below there in the courtyard. As for the woman, I only use her as a stick to beat you with, to make you guide me out of the temple. In return I will see you well rid of the woman. I will attend to the woman. You need not give another thought to her. Give her your blessing—and perhaps a little money—"

Bamjee knew perfectly well that no temple Brahmin would give up money to a woman. Thoroughly he understood the money hunger of the men who were supposed to get along without it.

"**M**ONEY? I have none," said the Brahmin.

"Never mind. If she agrees to be silent, perhaps I myself will give her some," said Bamjee. "I have plenty. The merchants of Narada pay me handsomely, in return for the risks I undertake. How many men are there who would dare to spy into this temple? Daring and intelligence such as mine command a market price. I could even spare you some—perhaps—if you should need it."

"To the giver the reward," the Brahmin answered. "There is virtue in giving."

"Yes, undoubtedly. But"—Bamjee blinked behind his spectacles. He was taking a long shot at a venture, betting on his own imagination and the inspiration of the moment—"who is to guarantee that Maraj will perform his part of the bargain? Maraj bungled that elephant business. It is true he induced a fakir to frighten the elephant, and the fakir was silenced by instant death, but who else suffered?"

The Brahmin's breath was almost taken by the question. Leaning, almost touching faces, Bamjee thought he noticed signs of that snail-like withdrawal into a mental shell that all the East knows how to practice and that is so difficult to probe. So he went on talking, telling what he really had learned from the woman, not what he guessed:

"It is a good plan to demand that the elephant be slain and that Quorn be dismissed from her service. She will refuse both demands, undoubtedly. The next move after that is equally well considered, since she is proud and obstinate and fearless. Let the deputation say to her: 'If true that this monster is fit to live, and that Quorn can manage him, prove that to us. Ride him yourself. Order Quorn to put the howdah on him, and do you ride in the howdah.' That is excellent, and she will do it, because she is young and foolish and excitable. But who is to guarantee that Maraj will make the elephant unmanageable? Who? Who guarantees that? I have a sum of money for that man, if I can find him. Some now, more afterward. Who is he?"

The Brahmin tapped his own chest. Bamjee nodded, but produced no money yet. He knew those Brahmins.

"How will you go about it? How will you manage a maniac?" Bamjee asked.

"Easily. We would withdraw our protection—he would not last one day if he should fail us. Besides, the old hermitage has been his hiding place so long that he feels like a ghost that haunts it. Maniacs have iron minds. They yield up no obsessions. Rather than be driven from the hermitage Maraj would—anything. There is nothing he would not do rather than yield that hiding place. Part of the plan is to speak to the Ranee craftily about the hermitage, inducing her to claim she owns it. We defy her. She goes for a ride on the elephant. Some-

body subtly suggests to her to ride toward the hermitage and take possession. Then I notify Maraj that she is coming to cast him forth. And there will be enough of us near the hermitage to be witnesses that she was on her way to seize temple property. Thus all Narada will know afterward that her death was a just penalty inflicted on her by the gods."

"**A**RE you sure you can find Maraj!" "Oh, yes, I can always find him. I have only to make a certain signal. Then I meet him at a certain place. Two of us know that signal. One of us is with Maraj to-night. He was to try to persuade Maraj to kill Quorn, but the plan appeared to me ridiculous—too risky—too many chances for Quorn to escape. I am sure he will be back soon saying that the plan failed. I hope it does fail. To-morrow's plan is better because she and Quorn will both die at the same time—Maraj also, perhaps."

"Much better," said Bamjee. "Here are three hundred rupees for you. There will be three thousand more if the plan succeeds. Will you be at the hermitage?"

"Yes. Please bring the money to the hermitage. And now you had better go if I am to guide you and this woman without your being seen."

"Come, woman! Come!" commanded Bamjee. But before he went he wrote his name in pencil on the toe of Siva's image.

"Proof," he muttered, "proof that I have been here might help, if the Brahmins—yes, it might help either way the cat jumps."

Through a maze of passages, in darkness, up and down enormous stairs between enormous walls, they reached a narrow door at last that opened on an alley.

When the door was shut behind them Bamjee sat down on the step. He had his pencil, but no paper, so he tore a corner off his cotton loin-

cloth, and on that he wrote a short note to his wife. He gave it to the woman.

"Take it to her," he commanded, "and say nothing until you see me. You will receive food and a bed to sleep in. But before you go to sleep, remember and remember and remember every word you heard that Brahmin say to me. Now run!"

The woman ran. Bamjee sat still on the step, his head between his hands. He was tired to the verge of hysteria.

"What next? What now? Are there any gods? I doubt it. If there were they would admire—they would inspire me! To the palace? Tell her? Certainly not; she would get the credit and Bamjee would be left out in the cold as usual. Then what? Never mind the danger—danger is the spice of profit. Who—where—what is the key to the riddle now? Quorn is!"

"Can I find him? Where did he hide that elephant? Puzzle: find an elephant. Only all outdoors in which

to look. And at that he may be indoors. Nevertheless, if I find the elephant I find Quorn. Not there? Only have to wait, perhaps sleep—Quorn will arrive presently. If I can find him, tell him, make him understand, perhaps—oh, damn perhaps! I am a genius—I can be what that idiot Blake calls a god in a box—no, god out of a box. Critical moment, pull plug—save everybody—here—credit—thank you, Bamjee—profitable—very. Where could Quorn have hidden that abominable pachydermatous atrocity? Oh—all that distance?—walk—well—"

Bamjee walked until he found a pony that had stood all night hitched to a shop door. It had a bridle, but no saddle.

"Flagrant breach of regulation number so-and-so—duty of any citizen aware of same to take steps—pony, do you know where the city pound is? Neither do I. Let us look for it. Canter, you hairy curse, or somebody may catch us!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



Chinese Flappers

THAT the flapper is not exclusively an American product is a discovery that is being made by travelers in the Orient. China, with its youth movement, is especially seeing a change in its younger generation.

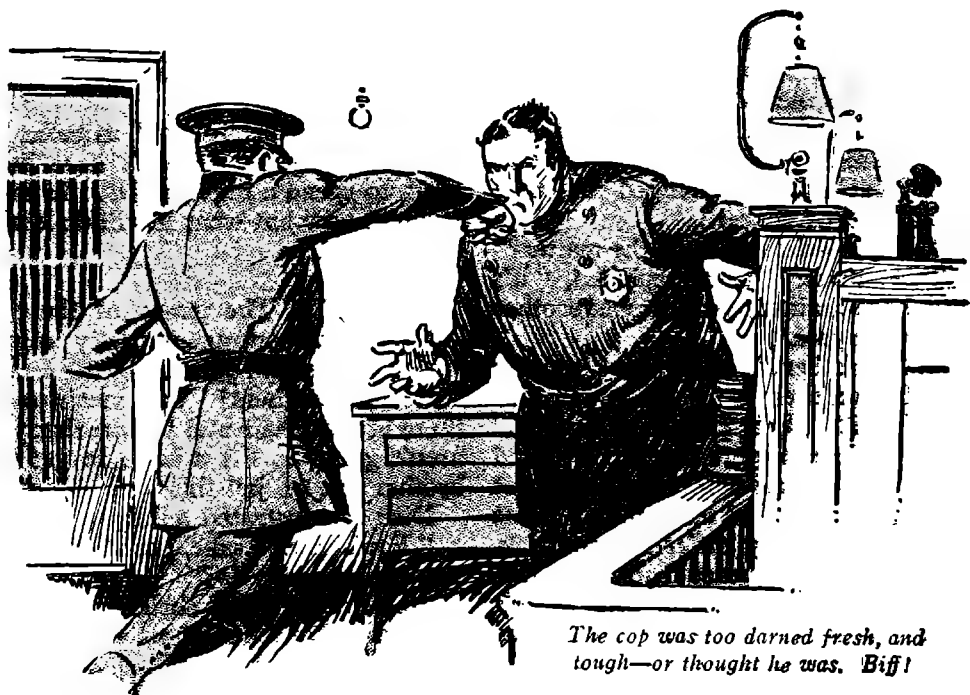
Despite the fact that China is a man's country Chinese girls are asserting themselves and developing a charm and naturalness equaling that of American girls. Short skirts, silk hose and lip stick are the weapons with which these youngsters are fighting their quiet revolution—a revolution shadowing a bloody one being waged between two internal forces.

For a time dances of the Occident had an unprecedented vogue, but the government decreed that American dance steps were not nice, so a law was passed.

Japan, however, is not enjoying the freedom that is China's. At best the flapper movement is anæmic in the land of cherry blossoms. Kimonos are still the flapper's attire in Japan.

Probably the biggest factor in promoting flapperism has been the American motion picture industry. The Chinese and Japanese are inveterate movie fans and the American manners and modes reflected on the silver sheet have made a lasting impression on the young Oriental mind. Chinese students who have attended American education institutions and have returned home have also been largely responsible for the change.

Harold J. Ashe.



The cop was too darned fresh, and tough—or thought he was. Biff!

A Bale of Trouble

Life in an Army camp isn't all routine and quiet, even in peace times—as Officer of the Day Dick Crothers found to his extreme discomfort

By LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER

IN the evening, after a day of hard work at the big guns, Lieutenant Dick Crothers liked to pull off his tight-fitting, highly polished boots, snuggle his tired feet into old slippers, pick up his pipe and the evening paper.

This evening dinner had been very satisfactory, so he was content with the world, and his life therein. His content was reflected in his wife Joan, pretty, dusky-haired, and young, who sat beside him reading the latest "best seller."

Br-r-r! The insistent ring of a telephone interrupted the quiet of the house.

The eyebrows of Lieutenant Dick knitted together in a frown. He glanced at his wife.

"I suppose that's the sergeant of the

guard," he remarked crossly. "He'll want to know some dumb thing or another. That's the trouble with being officer of the day. Your soul is not your own. You're liable to be called out any minute."

Joan's face wore an abstracted look. The heroine in the book had just told the hero that their love was all a mistake.

"Stop your crabbing and answer the phone, like a good little boy, Dick. You aren't officer of the day very often."

Still muttering to himself, Dick went into the hall.

It was not the grizzled sergeant of the guard at the other end of the wire. It was "long distance"—New York.

Joan, so absorbed in her book, had

not paid any attention to the somewhat lengthy and explosive conversation going on in the hall. When her husband returned, she looked up at him with a smile. The angry expression on his face quickly changed the smile into a look of concern.

"Why, Dick! What's the matter?"

"Oh, damn!" Dick exploded, "it's that hare-brained, scapegrace brother of yours again."

"My brother!" Alarm shot into her deep brown eyes.

"Yes, it's Herb. He's in jail again."

That was not quite true. Herb had never been in jail before; at least, not to the knowledge of his family. That did not make any difference to Dick, however, whose peace had been disturbed more times than one by his wife's younger brother. Dick was more than willing to give jails the benefit of the doubt.

"In jail!" Joan's voice rose high. "Why? What has he done? I thought he was in school."

"Well, he isn't. He called us up from jail. He said that he was down in New York on a week-end from college, and he got arrested for assault and battery. And, unless I go over and bail him out, he's liable to continue his studies the next few days in jail—the darn fool!"

"Oh, oh!" cried Joan in tones of horror. "Assault and battery! Dick," tears came into her voice, "what did he do?"

"Aw, now, Joan, don't get worried. He didn't murder anybody. From what I got over the telephone, he saw a man on Broadway kick a helpless dog, a street cur—and so your noble brother walked over and socked the guy one right between the eyes. Of course he was arrested. You can't hit a man on Broadway and get away with it, even to protect a dog.

"Well, that's all there is; there isn't any more. Your brother has got as much sense as a—as a mule! Chivalry is all right, but it doesn't always pay."

Dick picked up his newspaper, and settled himself in his comfortable chair.

"Anyway," he observed, as he began filling his pipe, "it won't hurt little Herb to spend a night in jail. In fact, I don't know but what it will do him a lot of good."

DICK!" The tempo of the cry, partly outraged, partly angry, made him jump.

"Dick Crothers! You mean to sit there in that chair and tell me that you aren't going to lift a hand to get my brother out of jail this very minute!"

Dick remonstrated mildly.

"For heaven's sake, Joan! What do you expect me to do?"

"Do? Do?" she shrieked at him. "Go up to New York immediately, and bail the poor child out."

"You seem to forget something," he said quietly. "I am on guard. Officer of the day. And as such, I cannot leave this post until my tour of duty is up—to-morrow morning."

For an instant, Joan was at loss for words. Then her woman's brain began to function.

"But, you can call up the colonel, and ask him to let you go."

Dick shook his head.

"Nope. Wouldn't work. The old man is very fussy about guard. He wouldn't let the O. D. off to go to his mother's funeral."

"You can try it, anyway. At least, you can do that much to get Herb out of that vile jail. What will people think?"

"Now, Joan, don't carry on that way. What do we care what people think? Nobody will know it anyway. Better men than Herb have spent a night in jail. Besides, didn't he do it in a good cause?"

Joan bit her lip. Her little slipper tapped the floor warningly. These danger signals convinced Dick all the more firmly that he would not go to New York that night.

"And moreover," he continued, "I see no reason why I should make a long, lonely drive to New York and back. I'm tired. So, that settles that."

Then the volcano erupted.

"Oh, it does, does it!"

Dick bore up nobly for the space of five minutes. But, even soldiers cannot withstand everything. And, finally, he strode viciously into the hall and removed the telephone receiver from its hook."

"Give me Colonel Wells's quarters, please."

An interval of silence. Then Joan heard her husband speak.

"Colonel Wells, this is Lieutenant Crothers. I am officer of the day, sir, but I should like to have permission to be absent from the post for a few hours to-night. It is very important, sir."

Dick listened respectfully. Slowly, a rosy flush began at his ears, stole into his cheeks, and crept toward the roots of his hair. He was being refused in no unmistakable terms. And, for good measure, the old colonel, irate at being called to the telephone after business hours to hear such a "damfool" request, was delivering a call down, and a lecture on the importance and duties of the officer of the day."

At every word of the colonel, Dick's irritation at Joan for having induced him to make such a hopeless request mounted higher. When, finally, he choked a "Very well, sir," into the transmitter, and hung up, he was ready to join battle in earnest.

Joan was in tears.

"Well, Joan," he said almost consolingly, "what can I do?"

Her only answer was, "Poor Herb." Then, more sobs.

After a time the sobs became less violent. Suddenly they ceased altogether. Joan's carefully curled head was conceiving another idea.

"Dick! Who would know, even if you did go? If you start now you can be back easily by three in the morning. You know that there is very little

chance of anything happening while you are gone. Nobody will miss you. And, as long as you are back in time for guard mount in the morning, everything will be all right. Guard mount isn't until eleven o'clock."

Joan started to dash out of the room to secure his coat for him.

"Hold on, Joan! I can't do that. You know I can't! If the colonel ever found out I'd be court-martialed for sure and be kicked out of the army besides."

Joan hesitated. She was enough of an army woman to know the gravity of the offense of an officer of the day deliberately disobeying orders and deserting his place of duty. But military regulations are not made for women.

"Take a chance, Dick! You remember the chances you used to take at West Point just to see me? I know you'll take this one to get my brother out of jail—for me?"

"No!"

For a good hour they fought it out. Joan pleaded, stormed, and cried in turns. Finally, as all married men must do, he gave in.

On the doorstep, as he kissed her good-by, he said:

"Joan Crothers, if I am caught, and kicked out of the army, I'll never, never forgive you."

He was gone. Joan heard the roar of their motor car as it passed down the driveway. Suddenly, she felt very lonely, and sorry.

AN arm of land, some four or five miles in length, extends from the mainland out into the Atlantic Ocean. At the very end of this arm lies Fort Sunset, on Sunset Bay. The garrison of the fort consists of the —th Coast Artillery Regiment and a company of Engineers.

Speeding along the deserted, paved highway that led from the fort to the mainland, Dick had a mind which was far from contented. He cursed himself for being such a fool as to give in

to Joan. He cursed his dumb-bell brother-in-law, whose thoughtlessness had been the cause of it all. He damned the fact that the whole thing had to happen while he was officer of the day.

Dick was worried.

If something came up during his absence which required the attention of the officer of the day, the sergeant of the guard would telephone his quarters. Not finding him—Dick tried to close his eyes to the thought—the sergeant would call the colonel. And then there would be hell to pay, with Lieutenant Dick Crothers on the receiving end. Let him try to make an explanation. There is no explanation for an O. D. deserting his post and his guard.

Dick squirmed in his seat. Court-martial and dismissal might be riding with him to-night. But he sighed; he had already committed himself.

Soon he came to the guardhouse, near where Sunset Peninsula joins the mainland. At this point the peninsula was very narrow. A heavy steel chain stretched across its entire width. Thus, no one enters or leaves Fort Sunset without his coming and going being noticed and recorded by the ever watchful guard.

The soldier at the chain, seeing that it was his officer of the day who demanded passage, respectfully let it down and saluted.

Once outside the limits of the post, Dick stepped on the gas. New York and return by 3:00 A.M.

Police Sergeant Eddie was hard-boiled. One had to be on the night shift in some of the New York police stations.

With a grim look, he surveyed the young army officer who was hurrying to his desk.

"Yes," he replied to the officer's question, "we have a bird here by the name of Dell. What about it?"

Enmity was born between the two men; the officer of the New York police

force and the officer of the United States Army. Perhaps Sergeant Eddie had been in the army in his more youthful days, and had been more or less justly disciplined by another such officer as Lieutenant Crothers.

As for Dick, his errand, his long, lonely ride through the night, the worry about his absence from the duties of O. D., all had not tended to sweeten his disposition, nor make his advances particularly diplomatic.

"What about it!" he snapped back at the sergeant. "There's this about it. I came all the way up here from Fort Sunset to bail him out. He is my brother-in-law."

"Now, take your time." The sergeant waved a heavy hand irritatingly in front of Dick's nose.

Dick's exasperation rose. In the back of his mind was the sense of time flying, time that should be spent at Fort Sunset.

"You may have nothing better to do," he said, using the tone he used to soldiers who had not done their duty, "than to sit there dozing all night, but I have important duties which demand my presence elsewhere. Will you please name the amount of bail and turn my brother-in-law over to me?"

The sergeant's face turned brick red. He was not used to being addressed in that fashion; at least, not since he joined the police force.

"Shut up!" he roared, "or you'll be sitting alongside your brother-in-law before you know it. You army people think that all you have to do is order this and order that, and it will be done. Well, that doesn't go out in civilian life. Get me? You're not in the army now."

"No," replied Dick hotly. "But I wish the hell you were! I'd teach you a few lessons in manners and civility."

THE sergeant came out from behind his desk. He was beefy, the man.

He made two of the slender Dick. He thrust his red face into Dick's.

"Who? Who did you say you were

going to give lessons to?" he demanded nastily.

Dick's patience had been so used up with Joan earlier in the evening that the slight amount that remained with him when he entered the police station had long ago been consumed. Had it not been for the worry about his commanderless guard, and his irritation pent up with his wife's brother, he would have been wiser and cooler.

Anyway, the cop was too darned fresh, and tough—or thought he was. Biff!

The red face snapped back over bull-like shoulders.

The instant he gave in to his baser emotions, and smacked the sergeant on his ugly, red jaw, Dick realized that he had done the most foolish thing in his life. Above all things, he should have tried to get out of New York with the least amount of trouble. Oh, to be safe on the road to Fort Sunset once more! After all, what did it matter if Herbie stayed in jail for a year, or even two?

The sergeant was more surprised than hurt. His red face had intimidated multitudes, but not one of them had ever dared before to take a poke at it—though many had longed to.

"Finnegan! Cohen!" he roared.

Two burly policemen, looking as though they had just been roused out of a sound and satisfying sleep, dashed somewhat wildly into the room.

Desperately, Dick made for the door. He knew what was going to happen. They were going to jug him. He had no time to be spending the night in jail.

The three of them seized him, bore him struggling to the floor.

The sergeant stood up, dusted himself. Finnegan and Cohen dragged their prisoner to his feet.

There was an evil grin on Sergeant Eddie's face.

"Put him in with that guy Dell," he said to his subordinates.

The awful tragedy of his misfortune now rose mightily before Dick's eyes. They were actually going to put him in jail. And, when would he get out? At the earliest, not before morning. Even should he be allowed to go free in the morning, would there still be time to reach the post? Guard mount at eleven. He would surely be missed then, granted that luck had singularly favored him by keeping his absence undetected until that time.

"But, sergeant!" he protested. "I—"

The sergeant would not hear him.

"In the coop with him! Striking an officer."

The cell was built for two occupants. Up to the time Dick was thrust into it, it had contained only one.

The light from the corridor dimly illuminated the cell. The first occupant indifferently looked up from his bunk. The effect on Herbert Dell of seeing his brother-in-law a cellmate, was astounding.

"For the luvapete! What did you do? Run over somebody, or something?" demanded Herbie.

For the space of five minutes, the cell was full of Dick's reply. When he had finally calmed down, Herb had the nerve to laugh.

There wasn't any murder, for after the humorous side of the thing had worn off, Herb realized the gravity of the situation.

"Gosh, Dick! It's too bad! Really, I'm awfully sorry. Really I am. If I had known the way things stood with you over at Fort Sunset, I never would have called. But, I thought you wouldn't be doing anything in particular, and wouldn't mind running up.

"Honestly, old man. If you had been in my place, you would have done what I did, too. Big, tough guy—he reminds me of our precious sergeant out there—was kicking a poor little devil of a dog around, just because the darned dumb animal got scared and lost, and ran between his legs.

"Well, anyway," he grinned remissently, "I'll bet that guy 'll think twice before he boots another defenseless pup."

Grudgingly—for he was still sore at himself for having lost his temper, and having landed himself in jail at such an inopportune time—Dick had to forgive his brother-in-law. After all, Herb's protection of the dog was a trait of his which he shared with his sister Joan. And, Dick loved the trait—in Joan.

"But," wailed Dick, "how am I ever going to get out of this place? Every minute I stay here is writing another word on my discharge from the army."

"Cheer up, Dick! It isn't as bad as all that. They'll let you out first thing in the morning. Guard mount isn't until eleven, you know."

"Yes. But, suppose something happens in the meantime? Suppose the O. D. is needed for something to-night. A fine O. D. I am! Spending the night in jail, miles and miles from where I am supposed to be. I'm not so sure, either, that I'll be out the first thing in the morning. What time does the judge get around? I don't imagine that ham sergeant will help me out, either."

"Oh, I certainly got myself into a bale of trouble coming up here to bail you out!"

NEVER, in all his life, had Dick Crothers spent such a long night.

Obstinate daylight absolutely refused to lighten the barred windows of the cell.

All night long, Dick paced the floor. Herb, in sympathy remained awake for a time. But, not for long. At sundry times, Dick had quite frequently remarked that Herb had no conscience. Now, he was sure of it. Anybody who could snore so loudly, and so peaceably, at a time like this—

Meanwhile, in Quarters 21 at Fort Sunset, another person was as sleepless as Dick. The Seth Thomas clock

downstairs had long ago bonged three times. And, no Dick. Joan turned in her bed for the three thousandth time.

What was keeping Dick? Had he met with an accident? She refused to think that. Rather, he must have been delayed.

She strained her ears in order to be sure of hearing the summons of the telephone bell. Every instant, her nerves made her expect it. And yet, if it came, she would positively die. It could mean but one thing. The sergeant of the guard seeking the officer of the day. Then, the cat would be out of the bag, the unauthorized absence discovered.

Morning came. A usual one for the rest of the world, but a tragically worrisome one for Dick and Joan.

The jail was awake, after its night of slumber. Cell doors were banging, the night's prisoners were being hurried off to the judges.

It seemed to Dick that every cell in the jail was exhausted before the policemen came to the one he and Herb occupied.

They were brought before a magistrate, who opened wide his eyes at the sight of an army officer.

The case was stated. The big police sergeant had his say. Then, Dick pleaded for himself, and his erring brother-in-law.

They were in luck. His honor was in the Reserves. During the war, he had been in the army—on the opposite side of the command fence from the police sergeant.

So, when the judge dismissed the charges against Herb and Dick—with a reprimand to the sergeant—Dick could have kissed him, while the sergeant's red face savored of murder.

Free! Dick almost meant it when he said, in reply to Herb's expressions of gratitude, "It's all right, Herb. Don't mention it. Come and see us some time."

Dick stepped into his automobile at exactly nine o'clock. Two hours to

eleven o'clock. Two hours to make the post. Two hours to make guard mount. It could be done, if he drove like mad at every opportunity. Pray to heaven that he would have no tire trouble. And also, which was more important, pray that the colonel was still unaware that he had no O. D.

Back at the fort, Joan was rapidly becoming a candidate for the Old Ladies' Home. She was sure that there were strands of gray in her dark locks. If there weren't, there should have been.

At ten minutes past eight the ring of the telephone, awaited with such anguish the night through, came. She took down the receiver and, in a very small voice, said, "Mrs. Crothers."

A respectful voice came to her ears. She recognized it as belonging to the first sergeant of Dick's battery. She breathed more freely.

"Is Lieutenant Crothers coming down to the battery this morning, ma'am. The captain wants to know."

"No—no—" she replied; and then was at a loss what to say further. "Oh, yes! That is, I expect he will. He is—he is out just now."

The wire yielded a puzzled, "Thank you, ma'am."

Exhausted, Joan hung up the receiver with trembling fingers. At last, his absence was becoming known. Not to the colonel yet, to be sure. But that was only a matter of time. Oh, why didn't he come?

At nine, the telephone called her again. She gasped.

"This is the sergeant of the guard, ma'am. Could you tell me where I can find Lieutenant Crothers. It is very important, ma'am."

Indeed, the sergeant's voice sounded worried, and much perturbed.

The O. D. was being sought. And the O. D. was not to be found. Oh, why had she sent him away? She had insisted upon his going! It was all her fault and he had been right. It meant little to Herb, that night in jail, but

Dick's being caught deserting his guard meant everything to him.

In a pitiful voice, Joan replied, "I—I don't know."

SHORTLY after that, the telephone began to ring in earnest.

The first message that came to poor Joan was this:

"Major Jones speaking, Mrs. Crothers. Where is Dick this morning?"

Major Jones was second to the colonel. Now here was trouble!

She managed to say, quite cheerfully even, for it would never do to let her voice give the major an idea that there was anything wrong.

"Don't know, Major Jones. Have you tried his battery?"

She had got over that one. She prayed that there would be no more calls. It was not eleven o'clock yet. There was still time, and if the news had not reached the colonel—

Even while she was thinking and worrying, the cursed telephone shrilled again.

"Mrs. Crothers?"

Joan's heart went down for the third time.

"Yes."

"Well, this is Colonel Wells. Ahem! Could you tell me where Lieutenant Crothers is this morning?"

At least, Joan was truthful.

"I do not know, colonel."

"Humph!" grunted the colonel. "That's very strange!"

Joan staggered weakly to a chair. Tears streamed unchecked and unheeded down her pretty cheeks. Poor Dick! He would never forgive her.

Meanwhile, Dick was defying all the traffic laws of the State, and getting away with it because of his uniform. Traffic officers cast a narrow eye upon him as he sped through towns, but on closer scrutiny they saw his uniform—and decided to let him go. The kinship of those who wear a uniform, and are in some kind of service, is strong.

As the miles fell away to the rear,

his spirits rose. At his present rate he should make the fort easily by ten thirty. Plenty of time—provided he had not yet been missed.

He refused to let himself think about the possibility that his absence had already been discovered. There was a good chance that it had not been. He had often been on guard before without receiving a single emergency call. \Let's see—Sergeant Jackson was the sergeant of the guard. A good man; well able to take care of most any situation. He would not be liable to seek the O. D. unless there was some unusual and grave situation which he could not handle himself.

So reflected Dick.

Only a few minutes more, and he would be there. And never again would he leave his post of O. D. No; not even to get the devil himself out of jail.

It was fortunate for Dick's peace of mind that he did not know that at the very minute the colonel was calling his home.

Fort Sunset!

Never was there a sight more welcome to Dick's eyes.

The guard at the entrance ran out from his little shack to let him through. Dick felt most embarrassingly guilty. He studied the soldier carefully to see if his face bore any look of surprise or wonder. But no; the man stood there at attention as if it were the most natural thing in the world for the O. D. to be coming home at ten thirty in the morning, after having been out all night.

So far, so good. Now, a drive of fifteen more minutes along the deserted road leading to the post proper would place him in front of the guard house—with a few minutes to spare before the fatal guard mount.

AS Dick drove along the concrete road which ran the length of the narrow peninsula, his worries decreased. Here he was on the post, and in plenty of time for guard mount. If

he had been too late for that, if he had not been released from jail early, his military goose surely would have been cooked.

Ahead of Dick two men stepped from the thick bushes which lined the road. They were dressed in blue denim. Soldiers, thought Dick, who had been sent on some cleaning errand to one of the batteries out of service which were scattered the length of Sunset Peninsula.

They signaled for him to stop. They were looking for a lift into the post.

Dick was the kind of officer who puts himself out to accommodate the men whenever possible. Accordingly, he brought his car to a stop.

The soldiers saluted.

"Can we ask you for a ride into the post, sir?" said one of them.

"Sure, hop in!"

Of course they entered the back seat of the car. Dick continued on his way again.

He paid no attention to the pair in back of him. In the first place, enlisted men do not carry on a sociable conversation with an officer unless he initiates it. And Dick had other worries on his mind besides an inquiry into just why the men had been on that portion of the road at that time of day.

Suddenly, a premonition, a sense that there was something peculiar in the behavior of those two men struck Dick. He was half turned in his seat to look them over once again when he saw something which made him give a frantic push to get clear of the wheel of the car.

The blue denim figures had been creeping slowly and silently toward him. When he had turned, they were almost upon him.

Too late! They had him, writhing and struggling in their arms. The car swerved wildly across the road, and headed for a deep ditch.

One grabbed the wheel, righting the travel of the car, while the other maintained his hold on the twisting O. D.

"What the hell's the big idea?" cried Dick. "Don't you men know that you will get court-martialed for this?"

They laughed nastily.

"Now, you be good, Mr. Lieutenant," cautioned the bigger one of the pair—it was he who seemed to be the leader—"an' ya won't get hurt. We'd sure hate to have ta bump off such a young un as you, but we can't have any one spoilin' our chances."

"If you do not turn me loose immediately," said Dick, in his most stern and military tone, "I swear that I shall see that you two get the longest sentence in the court-martial manual."

For reply, the man holding Dick said to his partner: "Stop the car, Jack. We'd better tie 'im up before we go any further."

"Okay, Snoopy. We'll throw 'im in the back seat, an' take 'im with us until we can drop 'im off some place where he can't do us any damage."

Boiling with rage, Dick resisted as far as he was able, the process of trussing him up with a rope which the pair discovered in the car. What on earth their purpose was, he could not imagine. What he did know was that the precious minutes were flying, that the guard mount was not far off.

HE tried to gain his freedom by another method.

"What is it that you fellows want? If it is money, I have darned little, thank God, and you'll find it in my pocket. Take it and let me go. I've got a very important formation to make. If I do not make it there will be some very serious consequences for me."

Snoopy shook his head grimly.

"It ain't money," he remarked cryptically.

Dick's wrath cooled considerably. These two were purposeful. They knew what they were about, whatever it was. And they were dangerous.

Throwing him, securely bound, in the back seat, they climbed into the

front seat and proceeded to turn the car about.

That, for Dick, was the last straw. They were going away from the post. His chances for appearing at guard mount were gone. Fate! What a mess his thoughtless brother-in-law had been responsible for!

For an instant, Dick was bitter. Why had he listened to Joan against his better judgment? If he had remained on the post, as a good officer of the day should, he would not now be in such difficulties. It would not have hurt Herb to spend a few hours in jail. Now the fruitless effort to get him out had cost Dick his commission.

Dick had no doubt as to what was going to happen to him. The colonel was a hard man, who brooked no infractions of discipline. There would be a trial by court-martial for deserting the post as officer of the day, after having been refused permission to leave by the commanding officer. The sentence—to be dismissed from the service of the United States.

Dick could see it all so plainly. It had happened to other officers. He had never dreamed it would happen to him. And yet—

Poor Joan! What a night she must have passed. She, too, knew the gravity of his offense, and realized the severity of the consequences. Even though he did hold her responsible, Dick in his heart felt most sorry for her. She had meant all right. A brother in jail was enough to upset 'most any woman, and make her do anything to get him out. Now she would realize.

Once more, the car was passing through the gate of Fort Sunset. Dick hoped that the guard would sense something wrong and investigate the automobile. But no. The two in blue denim must have invented some plausible excuse for leaving the post.

On the floor of the car, Dick tried to spit the gag from his mouth, tried to kick about to cause some commo-

tion. However, he had been bound too securely, and the unsuspecting guard did not hear the little noise he was able to create.

Spent for the minute, Dick lay quietly on the floor to regain his strength. He could see the broad backs of the two ahead of him. They were intent on the road.

An idea came to Dick. He could wriggle his hands from the wrists down. If he could get into the pocket in the door of the car. There might be something there.

SLOWLY, in order to make as little noise as possible, he wormed himself against the door of the car. He reached for the flap of the pocket with his bound arms. Too high. He couldn't make it.

He rested for an instant. Snoopy had turned around, and looked at him with a hard glance. Apparently, however, he saw nothing suspicious.

What was the game anyway, Dick questioned himself. Were they really soldiers? Or were they thugs dressed in the blue denims of working soldiers? What had they been doing on the post? What did they seek from him? Not money.

His car? It wasn't worth very much, and if they wanted the car, why were they taking him, too? Ransom? It didn't seem logical in the well settled part of the country where Fort Sunset was located. Besides, army lieutenants were not likely to bring much ransom money.

Dick could not figure it out. He began to give his attention to making further efforts to reach the pocket of the car.

Higher, higher. His fingers could almost lift the flap. The strain on his arms was terrific. The perspiration was rolling down his face. If they should turn now—

The flap was open at last. It slipped back again. Once more, the straining struggle. Again, he pried it open.

This time he caught it and held it up with his back.

Twisting and squirming, he worked his bound wrists down into the narrow pocket. It was a job. The coarse leather scraped skin from his knuckles.

All his labor for nothing! There seemed to be only one thing in the pocket. A wrench. That was nothing to help him.

He dug his hands in deeper. He repressed a cry of pain just in time. A sharp point dug under the nail of his forefinger. Hastily fumbling, his restricted fingers sought the instrument with the sharp point.

It was a homely old kitchen paring knife. Dick remembered it. One day Joan and he had cleaned the car. She had used the paring knife to scrape mud from the wheels. Dick blessed her for forgetting to take it back into the house with her. Here was a means to freedom, albeit a slim one.

With infinite care, he drew it to the top of the pocket. It dropped to the floor of the car. He sat down upon it. Just in time. Snoopy looked around again.

As soon as Snoopy turned his face to the front, Dick had the knife in his fingers.

His feet were bound closely together, but there was just room to place the knife between his heels.

On his knees, the knife-handle caught firmly between his heels, Dick began rocking back and forth, sawing away on the cords which bound his wrists. It was tedious work. But the increasing miles between him and Fort Sunset spurred him on.

He cut a gash in his wrist once. The blood soaked the fraying strands. Grimly, he kept on. If he won free, he would see about those two villains in the front seat.

At last, he was free! The strands parted so suddenly that the shock almost threw him off his balance.

Now for the rope which bound his ankles. In an instant, he was com-

pletely free. His hand sought the heavy wrench in the pocket.

TWELVE thirty.

Dick's heart was heavy and hopeless as his car bumped over the poor roads of the Fort Sunset reservation—poor because government funds, curtailed for economy, had not been forthcoming for their repair for ten long years since the war.

Beyond a doubt, guard mount had taken place long before. He was ruined.

In the back seat, two gentlemen in blue, dead to the world, and with ever rising bumps on their heads, were unconscious of the jolting of the car.

Dick made his way to the guard house—not with the hope that guard mount had been miraculously delayed, but because he intended to deposit therein the two audacious hold-up men.

A group of officers and soldiers stood in the yard in front of the squat building wherein was the headquarters of the guard, and wherein rested the prisoners of the post. An officer caught sight of Dick, approaching in his old car. He pointed excitedly. Colonel Wells looked, and then a stern mask slipped over his face.

Dick drew up in front of the group, and carefully stopped his car. Stiff from his night in jail, and long ride, and the ropes of his captors, he saluted.

Colonel Wells' face reddened to the point of apoplexy. He made inarticulate sounds in his throat. His blue eyes shot fire.

"Where—where the hell have you been?" he finally exploded.

Dick bowed his head in abject misery.

"Sir—I've been—I've been—in—" he gulped. This was the end.

Suddenly, one of the officers in the colonel's retinue caught sight of the two unconscious men in the back seat. He gave a cry of surprise.

"Look here, colonel!"

The colonel looked. To Dick's sur-

prise, the expression of the old man's face changed abruptly. Huge smiles broke through the storm. Colonel Wells advanced upon him with hand outstretched.

Dick backed away from him. Was the man gone daft? Was this the way to treat an O. D. who had been absent from his post of duty all night?

"Crothers!" roared the colonel. "I always knew you had some sense. While the rest of us were running around wild like chickens with their heads cut off, you went out quietly and brought in the goods. Believe me, gentlemen," he said, turning to the rest of the officers, "this is the kind of O. D. to have." Turning back to Dick again, he asked: "Tell us how you bagged them. Did they give you much trouble?"

Thoroughly mystified, Dick stammered, "Who? How? What?"

The colonel laughed good-naturedly.

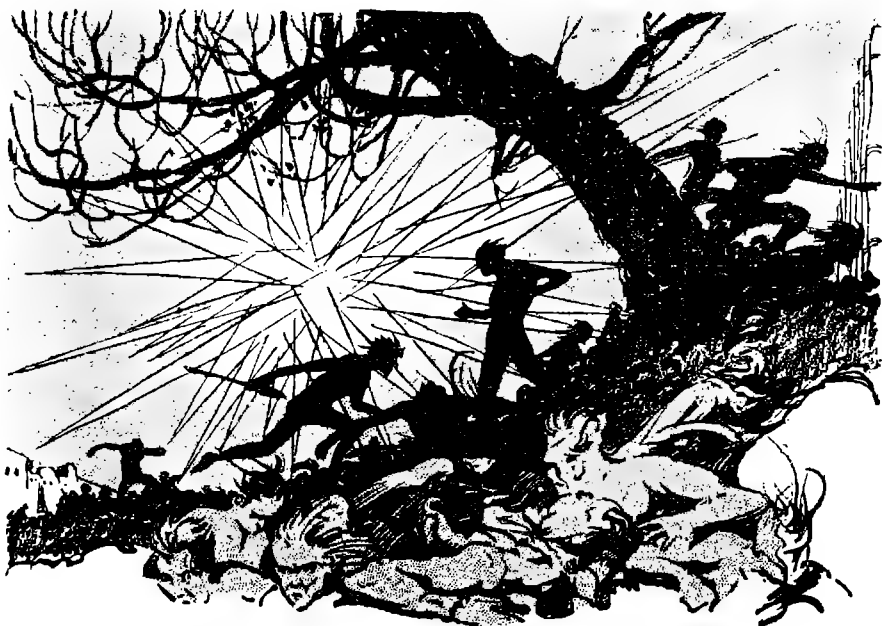
"Don't be so modest, my boy! You know, as well as we do, that those two birds sleeping so peacefully there are two of the most dangerous prisoners we have ever had in the guard house. It is a miracle how they managed to escape this morning, but escape they did. And you captured them single-handed and brought them back. I shall see that an official report of this is made, Lieutenant Crothers. It is not my policy to let such meritorious attention to duty go unrewarded.

"Now, sir, you stand relieved of guard. You may return to your quarters and rest. I dare say you need it. And, your wife, too. She was almost out of her mind this morning when I called her. But I can't understand why she wouldn't tell me where you were!"

Light finally dawned on Dick. He could have kissed the two prisoners now being dragged out of the car by husky sentinels of the guard.

But, he must hurry home to tell Joan so that the true story of his absence would never come out.

THE END.



A minute of blinding glare showed a strange scene

The Sea Girl

*The strange menace from under the sea suddenly overshadows Man's world
—and Jeff Grant boldly plunges down into a weird world beneath the Pacific*

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "A Brand New World," "Beyond the Stars," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SUNKEN food-ships and volcanic eruptions of steam, in the spring of 1990, presage a world-calamity of an unknown and amazing sort. By July the oceans have receded many fathoms, and Dr. Plantet, a leading oceanographer, claims that the errors in estimating the earth's density point to the existence of great subterranean hollows or honeycombs under the ocean floor—into which this water is flowing.

Furthermore, he believes that a race exists there, akin to mankind, the race that furnished the basis for humanity's legends about mermaids and Titans. This race, he thinks, may have broken through the ocean floor, in its first offensive move against mankind.

For his son, the romantic young Arturo Plantet, and the young navigator, Geoffrey Grant—who is telling the story—were in a submersible in the Pacific and saw a strange globular craft speeding along, with a weirdly beautiful girl looking out of a window. This was in a region where many ships had disappeared, near Micronesia, and where sailors on a passing surface ship claimed to have seen a mermaid.

Dr. Plantet completes his "Dolphin," a narrow eighty-four-foot-long craft between whose double hulls rapidly circulating water transforms the tremendous crushing pressure of ocean depths into "kinetic pressure," or the motion of the water; the Dolphin has

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 2.

a range of some two thousand fathoms' depth—twelve thousand feet.

The day before Dr. Plantet, Jeff, Arturo, and his sister Polly are to start, Arturo disappears with his Wasp plane and his private radio sending set. He flies to the island where the "mermaid" had been seen; and there he finds her.

Nereid, he calls her; a shy, very human girl, with green eyes and long tawny tresses; able to stay under water for many minutes, but breathing air. From her he gradually learns a few things about the "Gians," an undersea people who are draining the ocean and planning to invade the ethereal world of mankind.

Arturo radios his father, who brings the Dolphin to the island. Arturo and Nereid then guide him to the ocean depths near Maui, in the Hawaiians, where they see the strange great metallic shapes, containing warriors or engines of destruction, slowly and infernally being propelled up the slopes toward land.

The Dolphin's light betrays it, and a strange luminous ray strikes them, dragging them down to the depths. But Dr. Plantet fires a light-bomb, which blinds the undersea creatures for a moment, and the Dolphin's atomic engine drives them to the surface.

Arturo then has them go to a point in the open sea fifty miles from Nereid's island—and there, arranging a rendezvous with some one—or something—he and Nereid plunge over the side! Nor can the three in the Dolphin find any trace of them, on or under the sea!

CHAPTER VIII (*Continued*).

MYSTERY OF THE SEA.

I COME now to that curiously inactive year during which, had we not seen what with our own eyes we saw, all the strange events I have so far described might have been the fig-

ment of our imagination. The public knew nothing of the details, of course. And even the governments and scientists before whom we laid our report were dubious of our veracity.

But there were solid facts. Ships had been lost. The oceans did recede some twenty fathoms. Solid facts, not to be denied. And a mermaid had been seen. But that, as a matter of science, was a jest; and there was almost nothing left save what we said we saw. And with the going of Arturo, the solid facts seemed to come to an end.

The year passed, and the winter and spring of 1991 slid by. The oceans were down twenty fathoms, but no more. The disturbance of nature seemed at an end. There was earthquake and volcanic activity, but nothing unduly severe—nothing more than many other years of the past had shown.

Twenty fathoms of water were gone, it seemed permanently, from the oceans. The confusion in the world's affairs which it created was quickly clearing; we humans adjust ourselves so readily to new conditions! Ships soon were again sailing the surface, and none were attacked.

There was no attack upon Maui, or elsewhere. In November, 1990, we took the Dolphin back to Maui. The delay was because Dr. Plantet had been stricken ill. I would not have thought that an emotion, even for a son, could have stricken him. But it did. He denied it was that; but it was.

They had sent armed surface vessels to the Maui area, while Dr. Plantet lay ill. They bombed the depths; they searched with lights; they bombed with hovering planes. There was no response from below.

Then at last, with other scientists, we took the Dolphin cautiously down there. We were a long time finding that exact caldron depression to which Arturo and Nereid had led us. But we found it—and as though to deny us all credibility, nothing was there. This

enemy had withdrawn. I recalled that Arturo had said several things which hinted something of the kind.

We fruitlessly searched with a long, deep voyage of the Dolphin. And we thought of Nereid's island—Arturo's plane, and Nereid's globe which had been left there. We found the plane untouched, lying there, mute, pathetic witness to the fact that there ever had been an Arturo. But Nereid's globe was gone.

We found the little cave with its pool where they swam together, and laughed together, and planned this thing which had taken him from us. A few little trinkets of his were lying there; his violin was there—and a strangely fashioned shell comb which undoubtedly was hers. That was all.

Dr. Plantet seldom mentioned Arturo. But often, with Polly, I pondered the past; and there was much that my idle fancy could conjure. I saw Arturo as a gentle hero, sacrificing himself for his world. I read into the memories of those days the idea that Arturo went away with Nereid because he knew he might be able to check these dire, threatening things. Often I would say to Polly, "It's a fact that the oceans have stopped falling—and the menace has withdrawn—"

The public so quickly forgets! No one seemed greatly worried now over the mysterious things that had occurred in 1990. No one ever seemed to think that they might occur again. Yet to me, the menace always hung over us.

Arturo had said, "This may only be an experimental attack—the main warfare may be fought on land." Those wild desert lands which now we were calling the sea. They were so soon to be added to our habitable world, with our enemy infernal lurking in them!

MY ship was put back on its regular run in January, 1991. It was, to me, an eerie thing to be traversing again these waters of the Pacific, flowing through them on our pro-

saic commercial rounds as if nothing strange had ever happened down here. For the first few voyages my nerves were taut; I found myself with sharpened fancy and straining vision watching the passing green depths, as though every moment I might see a globe with Nereid's face. Or Arturo, in some strange guise, waiting somewhere down here to meet our passing. I sometimes feared that a beam of light which was not light, but something else might leap up from beneath and seize us, as the Dolphin that time had been seized.

The feeling after a few voyages wore off. Nothing happened; I began to tell myself that nothing ever would happen.

I was doing well financially. Our line was prospering. In March, 1991, the directors voluntarily raised my pay. I began to think then of Polly as my wife. I had never spoke definitely of love to her, yet there was between us an understanding—unvoiced, but I am sure that she felt as I did.

Much of my shore leave was spent with Polly and her father. He was planning a long voyage of the Dolphin, to chart the ocean deeps in the interest of science. I wondered if it could be that there was still in his mind some thought of finding a trace of Arturo. I think so; but he disguised it.

He planned to have me navigate the Dolphin. It necessitated my giving up my post; and I hesitated. I wanted to marry Polly; and to be working for her father, dependent upon him for my income, was not wholly to my liking.

The dreams and nightmares which were to have so strange an influence upon my future, began about this time and for five months they troubled me. I had always been, or at least I thought so, a person above the influence of idle dreams. There was nothing morbid about me. Dreams might sway a fanciful lad like Arturo, but not me.

But I was mistaken. These dreams—I had them, fragments of them near-

ly every time I slept—gradually laid their mark upon me. I did not speak of love to Polly; I avoided decision with Dr. Plantet over the voyage of the Dolphin. I was scarcely aware of it at first, but I became moody, silent, almost morose.

Polly noticed it. Once, with a very gentle tenderness which I was in no mood to appreciate, she tried to question me. I recall that I checked her sharply.

The dreams began unobtrusively. I remember the first one: I awoke with the feeling that I had been somewhere beneath the sea. The memory of a turbid vision of a watery waste, with things floating. The feeling of it oppressed me all day.

There was another. Young Tad Megan, a friend of Arturo's and mine who had been lost on a surface freighter in one of the disasters of April, 1990, stood in the dream before me. His face was very white; his slowly waving arms seemed floating in water; there was green-black water all around him.

Fragments like these. Recurring dreams, always of water—until, as my morbidness grew, I began to hate my calling that took me under the sea—almost grew to fear it.

There were dreams of music. Sometimes I thought that I had heard Arturo playing. Often, as I awoke, I fancied I had seen his face, smiling at me with a gentle wistfulness. Again, I saw myself, bloated, drifting in a turbid liquid darkness.

It is fearful to be obsessed throughout all one's waking hours, with the lingering memory of nightmares. I began to fear them—fearing the time when I would have to go to sleep and dream them again. I became nervous; my digestion suffered.

In June, when a grave blunder of mine nearly brought disaster upon us, my superior told me bluntly that my work was unsatisfactory, getting more so all the time. He did not know why,

and I did not tell him. But I fought with the dreams—fought to thrust them as nonsense out of my waking thoughts.

I could not—did not dare—propose marriage to Polly. A sense of personal disaster was upon me. I mistrusted everything. My health—I feared I would lose it, and lose my post. And there was another reason why now I began to avoid Polly. A recurring fragment of dream: A dim cathedral vault of green water with chimes ringing through it. A girl, like Nereid, with tawny floating hair and eyes with the sea in them, calling me, luring me—and always I would try to answer, and would wake up, calling my answer to her.

An obsession. I began to feel, even when awake and about my daily duties, the presence of the girl—her eyes upon me, her white arm and hand, flushed with the tint of coral, reaching out to touch me. And against all the reason of my sober waking senses, I knew that in my heart I longed for her. A disloyalty to Polly? I felt it so, and it made me increasingly morbid.

OF such threads was woven the fabric of those last days of Arturo.

I know it now. The lure was on me then, as it had been then upon him. But though I did not realize it, there was a strange but solid basis of science to all this. More than mere dreams; more than mere disturbed fancy.

I said nothing to Polly, or to Dr. Plantet, or any one. Like Arturo, I carried it alone. Tad Megan, drowned over a year now, was more and more in my thoughts—as though something were forcing him there. Even more than the alluring girl, the vision of him often came to me as I slept.

I had liked him tremendously. A short stocky fellow with a shock of upstanding red hair. A laughing freckled face usually red with sunburn. A jolly companion, who saw a joke in everything—all of life with its grim struggle to be taken as a joke. And

now he was dead, lost in one of those disasters last year which it seemed now would never be explained.

There was a dream in which I saw Tad very clearly. He was laughing; he seemed alive and healthy and laughing, and beckoning me to come and join him. Then water came rushing at us; his face went solemn; it went white and solemn and faded away as I struggled to get to him.

Thus I was, in August '91, nothing of the Jeff Grant I had been the year before. A moody fellow now, churlish and sullen, almost estranged from Polly and her father. I liked best to be alone. And so the momentous night of August 15 found me, with my shore leave beginning, seeking solitary diversion in New York City. I had been to a theater. I was returning to my hotel along one of the upper pedestrian levels.

Broadway was thronged. It was just about midnight. Down on the street level the vehicles went by in a stream; above them, to the sides, the moving sidewalks swung past with all their seats packed. The green-white trelisised vacuums cast their glare upon the busy scene—half a million people hurrying off to their homes, or to eating and dancing places for further midnight diversion.

Gay scenes of shifting, scurrying movement and tumultuous sound. At the crossings the directors roared their orders with electrical voices; loud speakers shouted their advertisements from every point of vantage; huge news-mirrors showed images of the current world-happenings, flashing on and off with advertisements interspersed.

A gay scene; but I was in no mood to join with it. That sense of inward depression, chronic with me now, sat heavily upon my spirit. I walked the crowded upper level alone, following its outer balcony rail. It was a rainy, blustery night. The street-roof overhead was wet with the falling sheets of

rain; I could see the water through the glassite, running off in rivulets. At a crossing, where in the side streets there was no roof, the rain beat down in a torrent upon glistening pavements.

The valley of the Hudson was off there, only a few blocks away—frowning Palisades; an empty cañon where last year the stately river had been. The muddy slope down to its center was caking solid now under the sun of these hot summer days. With the tide-water gone, there was only a narrow, swift-flowing fresh water stream down there at the bottom. The side-slopes were already being built upon.

I stood there for a moment gazing moodily. And suddenly it seemed that Tad Megan was there with me; something of him—standing at my elbow. Plucking at me? I turned swiftly. A man and woman had brushed against me as they passed.

It was eerie, nerve-racking. I tried to shake it off—this something, following me always. Ahead, another half block up Broadway, there was a sudden, tumultuous movement in the crowd. Something unusual. I could see the people rushing along one of the middle levels; voices rose in shouts. The excitement communicated everywhere.

In one of the moving pavement halts a thousand people suddenly leaped off to join the running throng. The stream of vehicles down at the bottom of the street was disorganized; the director down there was frantically roaring, but his orders were lost—the vehicles, fully half of them, were turning into the inclines to come up.

I gripped a hurrying man. "What is it?"

"Announcement. Government—official. To the public, at twelve ten."

"It's twelve five now. Where is it to be?"

"Park Circle 80. Government mirror there. Let go of me, you ground-er! What's the matter with you?"

I had been clinging to him; unreasoningly trembling. What, indeed, was the matter with me? I did not know. I tried to steady myself. I smiled. "I'll go with—"

But the man jerked from me and hurried away. Park Circle 80 was only a few blocks north. The crowd was all converging there. I followed, mingling with it. There must have been ten thousand people thronging that upper circle. They jammed all its tiers; around its outer diameter the vehicles stood parked in rows. I was a few minutes late. The overhead lights had dimmed. A silence had fallen.

The fifty-foot pyramid mirror, with its hexagon sides to face every portion of the circle, was luminous. Moving black letters were on it, for all to read.

Government official, midnight, August 15. Atlantic Coast, average tide at low, off five-sixths fathom—

I stood gaping, reading. Tide bulletins! A series of statements of the low tides of the day at different points along the North American sea coasts.

The crowd grew restless; a director's broadcasted voice roared: "Silence! It means that the oceans are going down—faster than last year."

The crowd swayed, shouted, and then grew still; awed, frightened into silence. All over the city, at all the circles, I knew that scenes like this were transpiring.

The menace has come again! Stand by for government orders to the public—

The menace had come again!

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE SEA.

THERE must have been a dozen near panics in New York that night, and in all the other great cities. Throughout all the rural districts, on every distant farm, the agri-

culturists were being aroused from sleep by the call of the official newscasters. It may have been a rational policy—I am not one to judge.

I stood there in the throng at Park Circle 80, watching, listening, with pounding heart. It had, this news, so much greater meaning to me! I knew what the menace could be; of all these people, I had actually seen the enemy.

Diagonally across from me, a hundred feet over the circle, close under the roof, was a strip of the huge luminous call board. I chanced to be gazing at the G segment—a column of the Gr names. They flashed past in moving letters: Gran, George; Grad, Francis M.; Grammer, Ruth—people, who might be in the crowd, for whom there was a message. And then, Grant, Geoffry. My name! Some one calling me.

I went to the nearest box. "Geoffry Grant—am I called?"

The girl clicked me into a distant connection; on the tiny mirror I saw the image of Dr. Plantet's solemn face, with Polly behind him.

"Jeff?"

"Yes."

"I've tried everywhere for you, for an hour. They said at your office you might have gone to New York."

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"New York. Park Circle 80."

"It's come again, Jeff. Tide water fell to-day—they figure now it's falling more than twice as fast as it ever did before. Good luck, Jeff—"

"Yes, I know, I've just been hearing the official report."

"I've been swamped with calls, but I wanted to get hold of you. Oh, they're not so incredulous of us now! I've had twenty of them calling me, to see what I thought ought to be done."

"Yes." An inexplicable constraint was on me. I knew I should join with vigor whatever Dr. Plantet might plan. But I felt an outcast; something was pulling at me, away from him; making

me silent, cautious of committing myself to anything.

His tense voice went on; his keen eyes showed in the mirror; I knew he was searching my face; behind him I could see Polly, reaching over his shoulder to catch sight of me.

"Jeff, they want me to-morrow or the next day in Washington. Great London will want us also. I suppose the Dolphin will be used. I don't know why they are convinced just by to-day's reports, but they are. This is the real menace, Jeff. They all say so, and I feel it myself."

"Yes," I repeated lamely.

"The oceans are falling—this time they will keep on, faster; it has come, at last. Jeff, I want you up here—"

"Yes." It sounded so horribly stupid, my dumb repetition.

"—want you to catch the 2 A.M. mail. Polly and I will meet you at Portland—"

"Yes—no! No, Dr. Plantet!" I felt as though I had suddenly found my wits. I could not go to Maine—I was wanted, needed, elsewhere.

"No—I cannot."

"Why not? Why, Jeff—" His voice was hurt, puzzled.

How could I explain to him? There seemed nothing to explain. I swept my hand over my cold, wet forehead. I felt like a traitor.

"No, I—I can't come."

It seemed as though, pressing around me in the breathless little cubby, were something of Arturo, and Nereid, and the face of young Tad Megan—here—like pressing ghosts, importuning me.

"No, Dr. Plantet—"

"Jeff, see here!" His voice was sharp. "What is this nonsense? What's the matter with you? Speak out, lad."

The crowd thronging the circle was in tumultuous movement now, every one struggling to get away. A surge of people and vehicles. I shoved into them, aimless, trembling. I had been a cad with Dr. Plantet. What was the matter with me? I did not know.

I stood for a moment against a direction post, trying to collect my wits. The crowd surged around me. The platforms for the near-by Yonkers District were loading up; the Jersey local flyer lay on its stage off on a side street, where the roof ended; I could see the lights through the rain, people crowding onto it.

Thoughts pressed at my aching head. Thoughts that I could not interpret. Soundless words thumping at my brain—I could almost hear them, but not quite.

Then a realization steadied me. I was not going mad. These pressing ghosts of thoughts—why, I had once heard a lecturer on telepathy describe the thing in some such fashion as this. It steadied me. Was this telepathy? Was something, some one's thoughts trying to get through to me? I clung to the direction post, trying to fathom my feelings. Arturo? Nereid? Or was it a ghost of Tad Megan, here with me? What was he saying—

A pedestrian director came up to me.

"You all right?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

He regarded me sharply; his hand drew me from the post. "Alcoholic?"

"No. Of course not!" I laughed.

"What's your name?"

"Geoffry Grant." I showed him my signature, pricked officially in the flesh of my arm.

He glanced up at the call board. "There you are—guess they want you at home. Get along now."

I hurried away, glad to escape him. My name was again on the call board; Dr. Plantet, trying to get me to come back and talk.

I found myself in the rain, on a lower street with only one level. The rain,

I CLICKED off the mirror connection so he could not see me. And then, with a sudden impulse that I could not check, I hung up the instrument and staggered out of the cubby.

seemed to clear my confusion. And suddenly I heard, soundlessly in my head, the thought:

"Arturo and Tad Megan need you. Come."

I stood against a dark shop window, with the rain drenching me. I thought intensely: *"Where? Come where?"* I murmured it, half aloud. *"Come where?"*

"Arturo needs you. Nereid's island—you remember? Come alone—come—come—"

I think, in that instant, all my morbidity dropped away. The need for action spurred me. This at least seemed something tangible. Something to do. Normality came to me, I was the old Jeff Grant, not a sniveling, trembling coward, afraid of his own thoughts. And I believe I understood, in part, what had been the matter with me all these months.

I turned back to the glare of Broadway, and called Dr. Plantet.

"I'm sorry I shut off on you, Dr. Plantet. Don't ask me—I cannot come."

"But why?"

"I can't tell you now. I'll try to let you know soon."

"But—"

Something said to me: "Keep your own counsel," but I added: "I'll trust you, Dr. Plantet. It's about Arturo."

I told him briefly I might be able to communicate with Arturo. Oh, I could not blame him for his prompt, vigorous questions! And his command:

"Jeff, you come up here to me, at once—I want to know what you mean by that!"

I could see Polly restraining him.

"No," I said. "I cannot."

I shut him off finally. Then I called my office; told them brusquely that if I did not report within a week they could consider my post vacant; to fill it as they wished, and to notify Dr. Plantet what they had done.

And then I boarded a vacuum cylinder in the tube for mid-Long Island,

to the field where aeros could be engaged.

"I WANT a single-seater Wasp."

The checker looked me over.

"For how long?"

I had not thought of that. "Why—for about a week, I guess."

"Guess? Don't you know? Where's your license?"

"You think I'm a grounder? Here you are."

I showed him my flying license; and my name on my arm, and I wrote my signature to verify it.

"Wait," he said. "I'll confirm that."

He put my signature into the telautograph on his desk; it clicked off into the air. My heart leaped. Had Dr. Plantet sent out a call to apprehend me? Would he dare?

"What's that for?" I demanded.

"General orders. We're taking no chances to-night. You may be who you say you are—I'm no expert at signatures."

The Washington Archives verified me, and the release came back in a moment. I breathed easier.

"Right," said the checker. "They passed you. Where are you going?"

"None of your business," I retorted. "Is it?"

He grinned. "Well, I guess it isn't. Not if you deposit the total value."

I gave him my draft to cover the cost of the plane. He sent it off to be certified and in a moment had it back. Within half an hour I was in the air, flying west by south. I could do a fair three hundred in this machine.

Noon of the next day found me over the Pacific. I stopped at Guadalupe Island off the coast of Lower California, to refuel and take on my final provisions. And upon sudden impulse I called Polly. The mirror presently showed me her intent little face. I was relieved to see that the room behind her was empty.

"This is Jeff."

Her face brightened. Dear little Polly! I felt like my old self now—no longer estranged.

"Yes, Jeff." She did not question; she sat there, regarding me gravely, waiting.

"Where is your father?"

"Gone to Washington, Jeff. Early this morning."

I had had no news, save the fragments the mechanics were gossiping over, here at the Guadalupe station.

"The tides are lower, Polly?"

"Yes. Two fathoms more—just over-night. It's come, Jeff."

I swore her then to secrecy. "I'm at Guadalupe Island, Polly. I'm going well, you can guess where. I can't talk plainly—too easy for any eavesdropper. Polly, listen, it's about Arturo, I've had—I think I've had a message from him—"

"Oh!" Her face went very grave; but her eyes were shining. "Father said last night—"

"Yes, I hinted at it to him. Polly, I'm going—I may not come back."

"Oh—"

"I mean—not for awhile. This isn't the sort of thing you can let the government meddle in—they'd send an expedition after me to investigate, you know they would." I added suddenly: "Polly, I'm sorry about the last few months—I've acted badly—I've been—it's hard to explain."

But she understood. "Like Arturo, Jeff? I knew it."

"Yes, I imagine like that. Only, it's Arturo calling me, Polly. Not—not any one like Nereid. Oh, Polly dear, you understand, don't you? It was—or I thought it was—something like that, but I'm all right now. Polly, see here—I called you for this. Later, some time I may, if I can, send you a message from—from down there. You see? If I do—don't be frightened. If you get to dreaming—nightmares, anything like that, don't be frightened. Whatever you think the message says—don't you attempt to come alone!"

She was very intent. "No, Jeff. What should I do?"

"Tell your father. If you are sure we are calling you—come with him, you see? We may be able to reach you, and not him. Oh, I may be talking nonsense! I don't know. But if you do get a call from me, or any one, don't come alone—don't try it, Polly."

"No. And you know we'll be waiting, Jeff."

"Yes. Do the best you can. There may be bad times ahead of us all. Good luck."

I was reluctant to cut off. But the operator checked at me for overtime. To be conspicuous was the last thing I wanted.

"Good-by, Polly."

"Good-by, Jeff. The best of luck—and love to Arturo. Oh, if he is only safe! I'll be praying for you." Her fingers touched her lips for the gesture of a kiss. Dear little Polly!

I cut off. In ten minutes more I was away, with six thousand miles of ocean ahead of me to Nereid's island.

IT was mid-morning when I raised the tiny island. It seemed deserted, upstanding with its naked spreading base in the fallen ocean. I landed in the empty bowl which once was the lagoon. All through the hot glaring day I waited. Night came, and the half moon was high overhead. I left my Wasp and sat on a little promontory under the palms, above the naked beach.

The low ocean was rippled with moonlight. A breeze stirred the palms. Upon such a night as this, just about a year before, Arturo had sat here, waiting. I found my heart beating fast. Who would come? Some girl, like Nereid?

And doubts assailed me. Was this all, this message I thought I had received, a trick of my fancy? Why should I think it a rational telepathy? Was I a fool, to be sitting here waiting? For what?

Yet there was upon me a strong feeling which seemed growing into a definite knowledge: Arturo was nearing me. As though physically he were here, standing out of sight behind me—the accents of his familiar voice ringing in my head as though he had just spoken.

My watch showed 1 A.M. I had slept a good part of the previous night, and dozed all day. I was keenly alert, sitting tense, searching the moonlit ocean. I saw at last, a mile or so away, something black bobbing at the surface. And then a tiny beam of light, waving like a signal. I got to my feet. I had pasted a device across my flash, crudely cut from memory of the one Arturo had used. I stood and held it level, shining it out over the water.

The light out there presently was gone; the bobbing thing vanished. But after a time it showed again. Close inshore. A shadow of the rocks was there; I could not see it plainly. It landed. And then I saw figures clamoring up the rocks in the moonlight. Three of them—and another stayed back by the round thing from which they had come. Three figures, coming up toward me. Two men, and a girl, white-limbed, with tossing hair.

I stood in a patch of moonlight. There was just an instant when the thought swept me that I was a fool—this was an enemy come to trap me. But I called, quaveringly, "Arturo! Arturo, is that you?"

There was a brief silence. The climbing figures stopped, gazed up and saw me. And a voice called up—a familiar voice. It was Tad Megan—not dead, nothing weird or eerie. A great relief swept me.

Tad's voice: "There he is—I see him!"

Tad Megan, and Arturo and Nereid. I could recognize them now. The relief of it! If I had not realized what a strain I had been under. But there was nothing uncanny about this. I shouted:

"Here I am!"

They came running up. Nereid, familiar as I remembered her; Arturo, strangely garbed, grown strangely older. Tad wrung my hand.

"No—of course I'm not dead! You, Jeff—by the little gods of the airways, it's good to see you again."

CHAPTER X.

INTO THE ABYSS.

IT was a round, gleaming metallic globe some thirty feet in diameter.

We entered its tiny doorway; a thick, complicated affair, it reminded me of the door to some great round safe in a bank vault. Tad swung it closed. The click and queer whir of it, in spite of these friends around me, struck at me with awe. We were going down into the unknown.

They were very businesslike, Arturo and Tad. And Nereid, with her timorous, flashing smile at me, stood aside and watched them. Ah, never before had I so fully realized Nereid's beauty! It so queerly stirred me; against all reason of friendship I could not treat her casually. Tad noticed it. He grinned at me, and whispered:

"You get used to it. She's human—she's not a ghost, you know."

They had had little to say to me; the business of getting us embarked and started occupied them.

"We thought you'd never come, Jeff. Nereid has been calling you for months. We need you. You, of every one, we've wanted. We only got your answer a short time ago. Nereid had almost given up trying to reach you."

"So it was Nereid—" I told them of the dreams. Nereid said shyly, "I would not care—I mean, it was not what I desired, to frighten you."

She spoke slowly, carefully as one who deals with an unfamiliar language. And very softly, with an accent, not to be described and a tone curiously limpid.

Arturo smiled. "We could not help that; we had to get the call through. You're not very receptive, Jeff."

"But Arturo was," said Tad.

They told me then that it was Tad, down there with Nereid, who had made her call to Arturo. There was so much that I would ask, but Arturo cut us short.

"Not now. Later, when we arrive. We've been gone too long now, Tad—you know it."

A different Arturo. He was dressed in short black trunks and a black sleeveless jacket that clung to him like a swimming suit. It shone, with light on it, like a thin woven metal. His black hair was closely clipped. His face was paler now than ever, but it seemed only the pallor of darkness. A leaner, rather longer face than I remembered. And stranger, and older. His jaw was more firmly set; his lips thinner and firmer. And his eyes were different. A flashing, dominant glance. More than that, they seemed larger, as though from living in the dark. And I noticed that here within the globe, the light was very dim, and carefully shaded.

There were similar changes in Tad. His short, stocky figure showed muscular in the brief black suit. His red hair was close-clipped; his freckles gone, with pallor supplanting them. He, too, seemed older; his face in repose, very solemn. But his manner showed he was the same old Tad—irrepressible; like Mercutio, he would make a joke of his own death, I am sure.

We sat on a horizontal platform which hung midway of the globe, spanning its diameter. A similar disk, of necessity smaller, was ten feet over our head like a ceiling. It made a sort of room, with a small metallic post upright in its center—a vertical axis to the globe. A queer, circular room. Seats stood about it; there seemed a buffet, wherein food was stored. And to one side, a table and shelves of in-

struments. A metal ladder led upward, through the ceiling, to the globe's upper segment; and a trap door in the floor gave access to a ladder downward.

The whole metallic interior was dim with its shaded lights. I saw that the room was hung upon this central axis. There were windows at intervals in the curving wall of the globe. Through them, with lights whose source I could not determine, a vista of the sea showed plainly. We were pivoted, as though sitting upon the plane of a huge top. But it was not our disk that began spinning. The globe's mechanisms went into operation with a slow throbbing; the disks of the room held steady, and apparently almost level. But already the central axis was turning; the globe was turning; the windows began passing in steady procession around us.

I asked no questions. Tad and Arturo were busy. I sat, with pounding heart, watching, listening, wondering. Nereid sat near me; I could feel the gaze of her solemn eyes. We had slid from the rocks; we were under the water. Sinking—rolling forward, or downward, I could not tell which.

ARTURO stood for a moment before me. "We'll be throwing on the pressure presently. Hold steady, Jeff; it will be strange at first."

"Arturo, see here—"

He smiled. "It's difficult, making sure of our direction. Nereid, you know the way—will you watch with us?"

She nodded, rose, and stood across the disk by the instrument table. Tad was there, and the figure of another man. I had not yet seen him closely. A slim fellow dressed in the brief black suit. His arms and legs gleamed pink-white; he sat now by the instruments, his hands roving them, his gaze intent on a bank of dials illumined with a vague purple sheen.

Arturo called, "Entt! Oh, Entt, can you come here a moment?"

He rose and Tad quickly took his

place. He stood before me a delicate-looking, almost girlish fellow. He might have weighed a hundred pounds. A trifle taller than Nereid, slim and straight and smooth pink-white of skin. He stood smiling—a hand shading his wide blue eyes from the light. A handsome fellow; twenty years old perhaps.

"Entt, this is Jeff, our friend."

He held out his hand. "I am glad." He spoke like Nereid; he had indeed her strange look.

I shook his hand, and said impulsively, "Are you Nereid's brother?"

"No—just—her friend."

His face was smooth as though no razor had ever touched it. His brown hair was clipped close. I liked him at once, this Entt. Gentle, deprecating, but there was a strength to him. The muscles of his arms and shoulders rippled under the satin of his skin.

He turned away. "I must go back, Arturo."

Arturo said, "He's been a real friend—there is so much we have to tell you, Jeff. But not now. When we get there."

Tad was calling, "Arturo, come here!"

"When this pressure comes on, Jeff, hold firm. Just sit tight."

Arturo left me.

Into the abyss. Strange, fearsome descent! A confusion of impressions. We had left the island. How far we went I could not say. An hour perhaps. The globe turned slowly; the illumined circles of windows with the green water outside them, rotated slowly around me.

And then the descent began. The globe had been throbbing, not only with vibration; with sound. The sound intensified. The globe gradually began whirling faster. I heard Tad say:

"We're located right, aren't we, Entt? By the little auk at the pole, I don't want to go down at the wrong place!"

"There's the marker we flung out,"

said Arturo, and Entt nodded. "See it—off there?"

I could see very little through the whirling windows. They flashed faster. Presently they were all merged in a band of light—a horizontal, circular band like a slot of continuous window. The light had intensified; it showed the water, rushing upward now.

And then the pressure went on. I saw Entt swing the lever; I heard the beat of some new mechanism. It was presently as though within the globe this air I was breathing went under increasing pressure. Yet I knew now it was not exactly that. A changing of the air. A mechanism taking out, absorbing the air of my world, and substituting something else, a new, a different air. The atmosphere of this other realm to which we were going. A greater pressure, undoubtedly, but the change was far more than that. I cannot describe it scientifically. There was no one ever to tell me the technical difference. But I recall now how I felt, there in that globe as we descended.

An oppression. It seemed as though a band were compressing my chest. I could not breathe properly; I began panting. My head soon was roaring, my forehead cold with dank moisture.

There was a queer odor—the odor of wet, clammy earth, a smell like a wet cave far underground. I struggled for breath; a nausea was upon me. Once I thought my senses were fading and called, "Arturo!"

He came running. I was gripping the latticed metal seat. He touched me; appraised me with his gaze. "You're all right, Jeff. Fearful at first, isn't it? You'll be all right after awhile."

I smiled weakly. "Yes, I—hope so."

Above the roaring in my ears it seemed that my voice, and Arturo's, had a different sound. A heavy, muffled sound.

"You're all right, Jeff, we've got it

on full now. You'll feel better presently."

HE left me. I sat gasping, but after a time the nausea passed; my head cleared a trifle; the roaring in my ears began to abate. I found I could still breathe, but it was an effort. The muscles of my diaphragm were tired now with the strain of it. There was a fluid quality to this air, I took it into my lungs and flung it out with a panting, gasping exhalation. It burned me inside, and my skin was burning; tingling, prickling, as though with a thousand tiny needles.

But I grew used to it—or perhaps all the sensations were passing. Another long interval. I got to my feet, with a strange sense of lightness. I moved my arm with a gesture; I could feel the air pressing it. Upon sudden impulse I swung my arm with a swimming stroke; it slewed me around and I nearly fell.

"Jeff! Sit down!" Arturo was regarding me. "Sit down!"

I sat staring at the slot which was the whirling windows. I saw presently a slanting vista of the dim turgid floor of the sea come up, swing over and go level as we settled upon it. I noticed then that the sense of lightness of my body was gone. I felt, on my feet, almost a normal weight; and I knew that most of the lightness was caused by our rapid descent—one feels it, descending in a swiftly-dropping elevator car.

Arturo, Tad and Entt, over at the instrument table, were actively busy. Their low voices reached me, but the interior of the globe was buzzing with sound; and from outside our walls there came the noise of a violent swishing. Here on the dark, soundless floor of the sea, was the sound of tumbling, thrashing water!

I stood swaying, straining to see through the blurred slot of the revolving globe-windows. The dark ocean floor; then I caught a glimpse of what

seemed an abyss; a tumbling white area of swirling water; a pit, near at hand where the water was lashed white with a huge circular swirl like a giant whirlpool. We were sucked into it.

Arturo's voice: "Sit down, Jeff. Hang tight. You fool, don't stand up like that!"

The globe took a violent plunge. There was a brief, dizzying interval of chaos. We seemed almost falling free, turning end over end. I clung to my seat. I could see the others clinging, too. A few moments, then we steadied.

We were, as far as I could determine, in the center of a circular whirlpool. The water held level; but now we were descending—our rapid turning motion screwing us downward. Another mile down. Or five miles. I thought it that; and Arturo believed it that far.

He came over, after another interval, and sat beside me. "Strange, Jeff? We're almost at the bottom. How do you feel?"

"Horrible."

He laughed briefly. "It will pass. We'll be at the first of the locks shortly."

He sat, seeming not anxious to talk. Nor was I, for every breath I drew was still an effort. We were dropping down like an elevator car, the walls of the globe whirling on the upright axis. Tad and Entt were scanning the dials. Entt spoke; Tad reached for a lever.

Our descent seemed slackening. The whirlpool of water was stilled; through the window slot I could see the water, black, with a turgid, inky blackness. There was a perceptible jarring vibration; we settled upon some bottom surface and stood like a top, spinning.

"There," said Arturo; his voice held relief. "Thank Heavens!"

The light in the water outside abruptly vanished, as Entt switched it off. A blank blackness out there. And then I saw a radiance; far away, it seemed, along a vaulted tunnel in which we lay. A radiance that congealed into

a beam of light. It darted at us; gripped us. The globe shivered. My memory leaped back to the Dolphin, caught in the clutch of a similar beam. This one held us; drew us forward into the tunnel. The black tunnel walls went flashing past.

Arturo said: "They've got us safely. It's all right now—"

Oh, I was not the only one who had been perturbed at this descent into the abyss! Arturo was utterly relieved.

"WE'LL be in the first lock very soon, Jeff," he panted.

"How far?" With my labored breathing I was sparing of words.

He said: "Ten miles or so. I don't know. They've got us safely." He called: "Tad, they waited. Suppose—they had deserted us—"

"Arturo, this rotation—this spinning—"

"Don't talk yet, Jeff."

I labored. "I mean the rotation screwed us downward—"

"Yes."

"Then why doesn't it—stop now?"

"The exterior pressure. Our rotation absorbs it—like the Dolphin's water-jacket—give father credit, he struck the principle—it's well known down here."

"Arturo—you talk—tell me—I can't talk to question you—"

He laughed at that. "Do you think—I don't feel the pressure change? I do. Take it easy, Jeff—you'll understand in good time. Ah, there's the lock."

Our globe stopped. In a dull glow outside I could see us wait an instant, then drift downward through a huge metallic door. It yawned open to receive us; it closed above us as we floated down through it.

We were in a square, cavelike room. Water filled it.

"The first lock," said Arturo. "They'll change the water pressure; then we'll go down into the next one.

Ten altogether. We'll be ten or fifteen minutes in each."

A new realm beneath us. My thoughts struggled to encompass it all. A mile, ten miles over my head, the ocean floor. Already it seemed so remote. The abyss of our Pacific Ocean. Above its depths, our great atmospheric realm.

Down here a new world, unknown; throughout all the uncounted centuries of the past, unknown save where our legends had glimpsed it. Another realm. A civilization, a science here; things mechanical; the rational thought of rational humans. These locks, gateways, changing pressures were all planned and built by skillful human effort.

So strange a thing!

The lock was dimly lighted. In the silence I could hear the throb of outside pumps, the gurgle of air bubbles, and the hiss of air and water. Against the side wall of the lock room, there was a small, transparent dome. A dull light was in it. The water was excluded. The figure of a man showed in there, bent over a table of instruments, it was the lockkeeper, attending the pumps for our downward passage.

Tad came over. "I say, Arturo, no twenty-hour watchman ever got as hungry as I am. How you feeling, Jeff?"

"Better," I said, "but terrible."

"You'll ease up. We're rotating slower now. In the fifth lock, we stop."

I noticed that the globe seemed spinning not quite so fast. Tad insisted: "Can't we eat, Arturo? Let's have Nereid fix it up."

We passed down into the second lock. The spinning of the globe slowed another notch. The second lock was a room like the first. The overhead door swung closed. The pumps outside throbbed. I could see the water changing; a thinner quality, its turgidness leaving it, a limpid aspect coming to it.

Nereid opened a table and set food before us. They all ate save myself; I could no more than taste it—queer looking food which all of them appeared to relish.

We passed down into the third lock; and the fourth and fifth. In each, Entt slowed our rotation. The slot separated into the spinning windows; in the fifth lock they halted. Our globe lay inert, vibrationless at least. I felt immediately less oppressed, but it was largely psychological, for the air we were breathing was unchanged.

"Is this the normal air where we are going?" I demanded.

"Yes," said Arturo, "it will be always like that. But you'll get used to it. They're thinning the water outside—presently we'll be out into air just like this." He added, abruptly: "Jeff, it's a relief to have you here. We are engaged in a desperate thing, Jeff. The welfare of our world up there depends on it—and more than that, Nereid's people—"

I INTERRUPTED: "Day before yesterday, when the public was given the news—" I said it casually, then stopped. Day before yesterday! Was it only that? It seemed so long ago—so far away, so like a vague dream, that bright other world up there which was mine. "When the public was given the news, there was almost a panic—"

"News? What news?" They stared at me.

"Why," I said, "the news that the oceans are receding again. A real drop this time. We couldn't mistake it, because—"

My voice trailed away. I gazed in surprise. My words seemed a bomb-shell. Arturo went visibly whiter; Tad's jaw dropped. Nereid exchanged a glance of sudden fear with Entt. They all sat confounded.

"Oceans—dropping?"

"Why yes. Off nearly three fathoms. We realized then—"

They sat confounded. They did not know that the menace had come to our world! I had assumed, of course, that they did, that they had sent for me, in some crisis now that the danger had come again.

Arturo gasped. "It has come! Tad, my God, after all we've planned! Done it now—why, what she has dared to do—why, it's irrevocable! We can't stop it now, Tad!"

A fear, a horror lay upon them all, and I saw that this was something more than the menace of the draining of our oceans, and a war with these people of the abyss. Something, to Nereid and Entt, more personal—more horrifying. And to Tad and Arturo, the defeat of all their plans.

Arturo leaped to his feet. "We've got to hasten—where are we?"

"Seventh lock," said Tad. He had recovered his poise; he gestured vehemently. "Sit down, Arturo—can't do anything yet."

Arturo stood at a window. I joined him. "You didn't know?"

"No! Of course not! We've been fighting it! She dared—"

"She?" I gripped him. "Who, Arturo?"

He shook me off, turned on me sharply. "Let me alone! We've got to get down to the City of the Mound, I tell you! To Nereid's father. He probably knows about it now."

The water in the seventh lock was thin and limpid clear. I could see the attendant in the dome-shaped cubby. He met Arturo's gaze; he smiled and gestured a greeting. Arturo tried to call him.

"Don't be a loon!" said Tad sharply. "He can't hear you. If he did, he couldn't understand your language. You know that. Wait till we get to the tenth. Then we can get the car and hurry."

I put my hand on Arturo's arm. "This is something more than we thought it was before? Our oceans draining. A war—"

He swung on me. "It's all that, yes. And more—Nereid's world is to be annihilated, Jeff! A million people, her people, drowned like rats in a trap unless they can escape upward in time! That's what we've been fearing—and it's come!"

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT THE WHITE GLARE SHOWED.

THE ninth lock was filled with a white, swirling mist. Air now; water no longer, yet I had not remarked when the change came. I stood with Arturo at the window; the room outside was gray with dank, wet fog. As we rested in the lock, the pumps outside were hissing with the changing air. The fog dissolved; the air seemed clear, with only a dim haze. The door to the lock under us swung slowly open. We were lowered, our weight handled now by mechanical device. We came to rest in the tenth lock. The air became wholly clear, the moisture gone from it.

"Very good," said Tad. They were preparing to leave. "Shall I open the door, Entt?"

"When we get, what you say—the signal."

The tenth lock was a room like the others, a square, solid, metallic room, with girders of metal reinforcing its rock walls. It was dully illumined by an indirect light, whose source I could not see. The keeper sat with his instruments in a cubby; there was no dome over him. Figures moved on the lock floor about our globe—figures of men, down under the bulge of our walls; I could not see them clearly. They were clamping some mechanism upon us; the globe was swung aside, into an alcove evidently to store it.

A metallic, railed balcony ran midway of the room. Arturo gestured. I saw standing up there the figure of a woman. A brawny, powerful figure, gray-white of limb, with hair dead

black. She stood on the balcony, gesturing down at the workmen, evidently commanding. A tall, gray figure, five feet ten, at the least. I could see her only dimly; a white shield like thin, flexible metal bound her torso; black coils of her long hair crossed her breast.

Our globe was drawn aside; the woman gestured vehemently at us. Entt called. "She said, ready now."

Tad was moving about the globe. "Come on. We want a fast car, Entt."

We swung open the globe's heavy door. There was a gentle inrush of air; it seemed purer, fresher; but it brought an intensified smell of earthly darkness. Our voices in it were heavy, muffled.

I gathered up my few possessions, and we were ready. Entt extinguished the soft lights of the globe. Our round doorway showed with the dull radiance outside; voices in a strange tongue floated in to us; the clanking sounds of mechanisms; the last hiss of rushing air. The woman's voice sounded sharp, vehemently commanding. With pounding heart I went down the swaying incline which they had put up. I stood on the damp metallic floor.

The realm of the abyss!

BLACK-GARBED figures crowded around us. Entt scattered them.

The gray woman on the balcony stood gazing down at us.

Entt led us away.

"See here," said Arturo, "Entt, you tell her we must have the fastest car. Tell her we're in a hurry."

Entt called up. His words echoed dully through the heavy air. The woman answered—a brief, sharp, rasping retort. Her gray-white arm waved us away.

Arturo spurred us with fevered haste. We went through a small, heavy door. Down a ladder, out into an open space.

A sense of great open distance lay around me. It was wholly dark; a

pregnant darkness wherein I felt that many strange things might be seen. A heavy, slow-moving breeze, coming from far off, stirred against my hot, tingling cheeks.

I gazed into what seemed an ocean of black space. I tried to focus my straining eyes upon something. Ah, there were stars! But I knew it was incredible. Not stars; points of twinkling light. They gleamed overhead, straight before me, to the sides, and even below—far ahead, but on a lower level than we were walking, so that I stopped suddenly, clutching at Arturo with the feeling that an abyss must yawn at my feet.

"This way, Jeff. Can you see?"

"No."

"Hold to me. The car is right here."

Tiny, distant points of light, like stars. I gazed at them across what was immeasurable blank distance.

But near at hand there were things vaguely to be seen. The dull blob of a passing man's figure. A hundred feet away, perhaps, the vaguest of yellow radiance. Figures there; and a long, gleaming white thing lying in an upraised framework.

Entt headed us toward it. I walked, swaying as though alcoholite had befuddled me. A different gravity here. I felt lighter; yet it was not so much that. A difference. There have since been many learned discussions on this subject; I am not one to attempt it in technical detail. I felt as though all my weight were not pressing upon my feet with a downward pull in normal fashion. There was a side thrust—first one side and then the other as I chanced to be moving.

As though by inertia, my movement tended abnormally to persist. A different application of the gravitational force. And I believe, too, that the quality of this air had its effect. It seemed an atmosphere almost ponderable as I plowed through it. There was a sensible pressing of it upon me; the weight of the breeze was tangibly heavy.

"Here!" cried Arturo. "Get away, you!" He moved with irritable aggression at a man who crowded us, gaping curiously.

A flight into the void, by air! This was an *aérocar*, waiting here for us.

A white structure of thin, flexible metal, some twenty feet long by four feet wide—open and flat like a long toboggan. There were seats on it, two abreast. A low railing, with bulging pontoons glowing dimly yellow. A streamlike thing; its forward end held a V-shaped windshield six feet high. Behind it a group of controls. Like a bowsprit of some ancient sailing vessel, a metallic tube projected out front. It glowed with a greenish phosphorescence.

We climbed on board. None of the attendants came with us; a group of them stood staring, whispering among themselves. Entt spoke to them briefly. The car trembled. The bowsprit tube in advance of us grew more intensely luminous, like a wire electrically heated in the darkness. The air around the tube snapped with a myriad tiny sparks.

Arturo said: "That air out front is dissolving—we'll move forward into the vacuum."

The glowing pontoons along our sides hissed with a downward thrust of gas. We lifted. The metallic stage with its staring group of figures dropped away. Entt tilted the luminous tube a trifle upward. We slid forward into the vacuum.

Faster. The wind went rushing past us. We slid out and upward into the blackness of the void, with its tiny points of light twinkling like stars in the distance.

I HAVE flown, off and on, all my life. But this flight in the void of the abyss had an eerie unreality. Unreal, like the magic fancy of a child. Witches on a broomstick, with the rushing night around them, slanting up into the stars. Or a magic strip of car-

pet, this white thing upon which we crouched. Rushing through the wind; flexible, bending, undulating throughout its length beneath us.

We spoke very little; the noise of the wind tore at our words. I pulled at Arturo's arm.

"How long—this light?"

"An hour and a half, perhaps."

My eyes seemed growing accustomed to the darkness; I strained them into the black space dotted with stars. Not many; occasional groups of them, above us, and as I gazed down over the low rail, I could see them twinkling underneath. The immensity of celestial space, as though we were rushing through it, out among the stars.

The sensation was suddenly dispelled. These were not stars, gigantic, infinitely far away, but points of man-made light, comparatively close. Gazing down, with vision expanding now in the darkness, I made out a vague black surface sliding under us. It lay, not horizontal, but sloping at a sharp angle, and I knew then that we were flying tilted partly sidewise. And while I stared, it swung level as we righted.

A dark surface of land; and the stars were lights down there. I saw them now as different colors, and in groups which might serve as landmarks.

The thin white shape of another *aërocar* rushed past us overhead.

We were descending now. I had guessed the surface to be some ten thousand feet beneath us. We dropped lower. I could make out a rocky, undulating landscape. Occasional patches of what might have been soil. Shining, narrow ribbons of roads. Areas of vegetation.

We passed over a village. Dull spots of light, merged into a glow. I saw the dark shapes of houses; on a hillside, tiers of them. There was movement down there, in city streets. Off to one side, beyond the settlement, a great flat structure was bathed in a red blast of light. It seemed a factory. A pit in the rocks beside it glowed red.

We swept on. The settlement vanished behind us. I saw a point of light, like a beacon, set on the summit of a rocky cliff. It changed color at intervals. Entt remarked it, with a gesture to Tad. He swung the controls; we went into a sharp, upward climb.

There were points of light always showing in the black void over our heads. As we had descended toward the rocky landscape, the lights overhead had grown very dim. I gazed up at them. They twinkled up there, very faint and dim now. I wondered what they could be. Not *aërial* beacons, poised over us? As we climbed, they began to brighten.

My imagination struggled to cope with this I was seeing. This silent realm down here—I had the sense of a great celestial spaciousness, but I knew that it was not so. This was within our earth, underground; a great, black void here, like a titanic cave. Yet it must be of finite area; comparatively small. Over my head now—up there where the points of light blazed like stars—must be some great rocky ceiling. And above that, miles above it, no doubt, my imagination saw the floor of our Pacific Ocean!

We ascended in a steep slant. The upper stars brightened. The lights beneath dimmed with distance. Then I saw overhead the outlines of what indeed was a rocky ceiling. It spread horizontally over us; eight or ten thousand feet still up there, at the least. I saw the lights set in this rocky ceiling.

AND then I gasped. With sudden, changing viewpoint, I saw what was the truth. There were ribbons of roads on the rocky ceiling. Patches of open space that might have been soil. An open area glowing with light; houses in it—a settlement! It hung up there, the distant, small image of it—a settlement of houses and streets, upside down, perilously clinging to our ceiling!

It was then that my viewpoint changed. I envisaged, very suddenly, that our aëro was flying overturned. This land was beneath us, not above! Hanging head downward, as I have often done in a Wasp, I was staring down at this dark surface over which we were speeding. And as though to verify the fancy, I heard Entt speak, and saw him swing us. The void began slowly turning over. The dim stars came slowly swinging overhead; the rocky ceiling went down and steadied horizontally beneath us. Normality came again.

I grasped it now. This void, this titanic cave, was peopled on all its inner surface. Floor and ceiling, no difference. So strange! And yet was it? My fancy held that just a moment ago, this void had swung completely over. Our whole great earth lying outside it, had turned. This ceiling, which now was beneath us, was not a ceiling, but a floor. But in reality it was only our aëro which had turned.

So strange a thing, this inner surface peopled both top and bottom; up and down. But was it so strange? On the surface of our earth, we in the Americas visualize ourselves always as upright. Our heads are to the stars; our feet to the great earth which always lies bulging under us. And we can fancy China, down there with all its people hanging head downward. Yet we know that in twelve hours, they must be on top, and ourselves hanging down.

Up and down! Meaningless terms when used to try and denote anything of the Absolute! There is, indeed, in all our universe, no term of time or space, or motion that means anything, when taken by itself alone.

The gravity here in this void? The new textbooks explain it in most learned fashion. They talk of different air quality, different pressure down here. The great bulk of our earth, encompassing this inner void to give rise to whole new sets of mathematical

formulæ. They say that our scientists had never before encountered an underground area which had its own atmosphere, subject to its own pressures and laws. Let them have their say; I tell only what I saw and felt.

We were dropping suddenly downward in a swift spiral. Arturo touched me. "The City of the Mound. See it there?"

A low, rocky mound-shaped hill lay beneath us, a mile or so off to one side. It was dotted with lights, covered with houses—low, circular houses, seemingly of a gray-black stone. We dropped lower. The mound was perhaps three hundred feet high. The houses were set on its slopes, in tiers. Streets were between them, in orderly array—horizontal streets, like circular bands around the hill; and there were other streets running down the slope. One side was a gentle declivity; the other, a steep, almost precipitous descent. The street there went down a broad, metallic ladder.

Arturo gestured. "Her house is there—the Great Woman. At the top of the mound."

The wind was lessening as our flight slowed and we settled. I demanded:

"What woman? That one we saw in the tenth lock?"

"Nonsense. She was a subordinate. The Empress—I call her that. Ruler of this realm, I mean; you'll see her. We had intended to have you—"

He broke off. He was highly nervous—high-pitched, overwrought, I could not mistake it; abstracted, deep in his own thoughts, with little time yet for me. And he was never one to brook questions.

I turned away from him, absorbing myself in the scene of our landing. At the very peak of the mound was the house Arturo had indicated. A squat spreading building of dark frowning ramparts like some ancient moldy fortress. It stood there with a faint sheen of light upon it, grim and forbidding.

Around it was an open space—a garden, with paths and low shrubs; beyond that, encircling it, a low palisade like a fence, with the city houses crowding it.

WE were still at a high enough altitude for me to get a distant view. The houses covered the mound, and at its foot, thinner down on the level, they spread out into suburbs over the near-by rocky landscape. At the outer city fringes I saw a distant field with things growing.

It was everywhere a squat, solid landscape. The houses, all of one low story, sat squat upon the ground. There were trees, a dark forest over which we passed. The trees spread thick and wide, but low to the ground like shrubs. There was little height to anything.

I had seen no water. But now, on the edge of the city, I made out a dull-white, winding ribbon that I thought might be a river.

We swung down to within a thousand feet of the frowning palace fortress. On its flat roof in a sheen of light I could make out the tiny dark blobs of figures standing in a group by a parapet-wall. From the roof a point of fire suddenly mounted. It came up toward us, mounting slowly. My heart leaped; for an instant I thought it was a missile, sent up to strike and destroy us. But it rose no more than a hundred feet; then it opened into a great ball of white light. For perhaps a minute it hung poised, burning.

Entt gave a cry of fear. He and Nereid sat with hands to their eyes, blinded by the white glare. I felt our aëro wavering; Arturo leaped from my side; he and Tad, themselves shading their eyes, clung to the controls. We wavered, but they held us steady after a moment, circling over the fortress-roof, spiraling slowly down.

On the roof-top, the figures stood with what seemed dark glasses over

their eyes. We had dropped still lower; I made them out plainly. Twenty of them at least; most of them tall, gray-limbed women. They stood gazing, not at us, but down at the city, regarding with shaded eyes the scene revealed by the white glare of light they had sent up.

A crowd of people pressed against the garden-palisade. Some of them had evidently climbed it and were in the fortress garden. Men, and women with flowing tawny hair. All of them like Nereid and Entt. A different race from these gray giantess Amazons on the rooftop. They thronged against the garden palisade. Crowds of them surged in all the upper city streets. Crude weapons were in their hands—implements, perhaps, of agriculture.

An attack upon the fortress. It seemed so. It had evidently been done quietly—now which was doubtless the quiet time of sleep. But it had been discovered. In the white revealing glare the mob was stricken. The blinded figures in the garden were trying to run back—in a panic trying to escape. They stumbled, fell. Rose and blindly staggered away. I saw one run headlong against a tree trunk.

The quiet of the scene—it had been wholly quiet in the darkness a moment before—was broken by their cries of panic. At the palisade the milling throng was struggling to force its way backward against the press of those behind. The city was in a turmoil.

A minute of that white glare; then the flare burned out and blank darkness came again. For a time I could see nothing. I heard Arturo's and Tad's voices:

"Tad, my God—did you see that?"

"Yes."

"It's come—the revolt! But, Tad, we're not ready. Nothing is ready—"

From beneath us, on the dark fortress roof we were nearing, a cry floated up. A strident, woman's voice, laughing ironically.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



"Mr. Halloran and
one of the local talent,
I believe?"

Just a Bit Too Fast

*Thought-and-a-half Morgan was exactly that far ahead of his
dull-witted police pursuers—or so he thought*

By HAL MOORE

WHEN the somewhat forlorn-looking six-cylinder touring car drew up across the street before the Peninsula Park branch bank, I didn't give it a second thought. Neither did Halloran—and if either of us should have noticed, he was the one. He was supposed to know Thought-and-a-half Morgan.

No, neither of us gave it a thought; not until we noticed that the seeming-asleep young egg at the wheel had kept his motor running. Then we both dashed across the asphalt in a damned big hurry.

Detective Halloran had made a thousand-mile jump to spill his story to my chief—the tip he had, that Thought-and-a-half was about to essay in our fair village of one million souls

a few of the strokes that had brought him much notoriety throughout the nation at large—and a considerable price on his head. Halloran's chief back home was due for the sack if this looter of six banks in six days was not chucked in durance vile. He had sent out his star man with some info bulldozed from one of Morgan's minor aids.

It was supposed to be infallible stuff; the man Morgan, who had won his moniker by being at least one think-and-a-fraction ahead of the brainiest cop that ever lived, had moved in on us. Halloran said he had practically the entire dope; but my chief, noting with disgust the opportunities taken by Halloran to advertise his own astuteness, and feeling pretty secure over

the fact that a major job hadn't been pulled in our village for months, didn't lend an overly receptive ear.

He had enough to do, speaking at Rotary and Kiwanis luncheons, and the like; so he merely growled: "You run around with him, Jake, and if you need help lemme know."

Those had been my orders. Dashing across toward the bank with Halloran, I wondered if this was the time to report. Well, if it was, it was too late now. Morgan could have taken the bank's foundations with him if we laid back for reinforcements. But maybe this wouldn't be Morgan, I thought, tugging at my armpit to pull my gun free in a second, if need be. Just as Halloran and I dashed into the entry-way I caught a side glimpse of the dude behind the wheel. He was watching us, but his talons were resting on the steering-wheel in plain sight. Which is somewhat unusual for an outside man—if he was one.

We almost bowled over a customer or two, getting inside, but finally landed right side up in the bank lobby. I flashed a look around, then turned to Halloran. He had just completed a similar look-see. I hope I didn't appear as sheepish as he did.

In brief, business was going on as usual.

"Who the hell ever said I was a cop?" grunted Halloran to me in a tone spilling over with disgust.

"Yes, whoever said such a thing?" came a throaty voice behind my back. I couldn't see the party, but that didn't keep gooseflesh from prickling up on my neck. There's no mistaking the determined prod of a gat in the small of the back, just above the kidneys. Halloran stood as motionless as I, and out of the corner of my eye I could see about three inches of the persuader that was making a good Indian out of him. Our friend was evidently a two-gun man.

"Mr. Halloran and one of the local talent, I believe?" The words had a

sarcastic smirk to them. "I had an idea some one might be coming along, so I stopped at the desk here to write out a deposit slip. Wonderful device, that, for killing time and covering the back trail—and who'd ever suspect a nice old woman like me?"

At the risk of having my viscera spread all over the lobby from gunfire immediately to my rear, I took a side-wise peek at a mirror hanging on the far wall. You could 'a' knocked me dead when I spotted the reflection. Old lady was right—skirt, Sunday bonnet and all! This Thought-and-a-half certainly earned his nickname. If he didn't look like one of Punkinville's sturdy old-time housewives I'll eat my shoes—and they're size elevens. He'd even duplicated the little hunch in the shoulders that comes with age.

Now I knew why the outside man hadn't raised a holler. He'd evidently worked with Thought-and-a-half before, and knew what real confidence should be.

All this flashed through the old bean in far less time than it takes to tell it—all this and more. For I had noted also that this bank out in the rhubarbs of our city had, at 2.48 P.M. of a dull winter day, mighty few customers. In fact not as many were in the corridor as were behind the wicket windows. The boy with the guns stuck in our manly backs had picked his moment right.

I WONDERED just when the fireworks would begin, and how. But I didn't have to wonder long. Folks were getting kind of curious, seeing us with hands in air. But no one cared to risk reaching for a gun, even if there happened to be one in the place. There were but three likely targets; two unmistakable plainclothes men in unmistakably embarrassing positions, and a fantastic but seemingly perfectly harmless farmwife.

Acting as if he were having a hard time to keep from laughing, Morgan began his orders.

"Tell 'em you're bulls!" snapped the voice, coldlike.

Halloran almost strangled, getting that order out, and damned if I could blame him.

"We—uh—we're police officers," he gurgled, "and we're—we're—uh—ordered to say that we'll—uh—protect you!"

Some heartless gink snickered.

It sounded from suspiciously near my coat tails.

"Tell 'em to be good, and for that young blond teller to collect all the money—all the money—on the counters, and bring it over here where I can watch him every step of the way."

The announcement was broadcast as per request.

For a moment the blond young man seemed to hesitate, and looked longingly at what must have been an alarm push-button.

"Call off that fool!" rasped Thought-and-a-half.

"Hold 'er, son!" cried Halloran. "I know this guy. He'll sink me with a load o' lead if you don't behave!"

The young man—thank the Lord—changed his mind.

With the currency in a couple of canvas sacks, as our unseen "farm-wife" had ordered, the blond teller started across the tiled floor toward us. He stepped along right bravely for the first few yards, but uneasy as I was, with that gat prodding me in the suspender buttons, I took courage from watching his knees wobble the last few paces. It's no fun walking up to a cocky bank artist who holds two hair-trigger cannons and knows how to use 'em.

But he finally got the money on the small table as directed. It lay right at our elbow, the table being the one selected by our temporary guardian for his time-killing writing stunt early in the game.

Everybody in the bank was giving undivided attention, when Morgan sang out on his own accord:

"Now, folks, if you don't want to mop up a lot of blood off'n this floor, you just stay mannerly until we ring down the curtain. Mr. Halloran here is going to remain deathly still while I remove one gun from his mid-section that I may divest his partner"—the same being me—"of all weapons. Mr. Halloran knows that if he moves, this amiable square-toes at his side will suddenly release all right and title to his spirit— Ah, thank you, Mr. Halloran.

"Now, folks, Mr. Halloran's partner will freeze into inactivity while Mr. Halloran's gun is likewise extracted— Ah, thank you both! As a parting word of advice, don't risk a shot while I kick both these guns under the steam radiator that I may grab today's earnings. It might be awfully tough on these perfectly nice officers."

I heard both rods clatter against the side wall, and then saw a hand flash out from behind me and grab the canvas sacks. A hurried clatter of steps, a tense "So long!" and the roar of a six-cylinder motor outside; it was over.

Without waiting to cast a look over my shoulder, I scurried for that radiator, clomped down on my knees and pawed through a two-inch layer of dust that some lazy janitor had allowed to collect there.

Halloran was abreast of me. We retrieved our guns almost at the same instant and dashed outside.

Two blocks away, and taking no notice of traffic laws or anything else, that decrepit-looking heap was cutting the air at a fast clip. It was sure a deceiving cuss when it came to performance.

We commandeered a shiny big car that was threading its way through traffic about three jumps from the curb, but there was a precious second wasted trying to get the idea through the mind of the bozo at the wheel. Once he did wake up, however, he sure did live up to the reputation of flaming

youth. Not more than nineteen, perhaps, but he stomped a wicked accelerator.

"I don't know this blamed town of yours," howled Halloran in my ear. "Which way is the bimbo heading?"

"Running parallel to the city limits now," I shouted back above the roar of wind and motor, "and if he keeps on, and takes the right hand turn about a mile ahead, he'll be hitting for the great open spaces. A State highway leads dead away from there."

The kid at the wheel was doing his best to catch Thought-and-a-half's fleet little wreck, but he didn't have near as much at stake as did the parties ahead and consequently just would not take quite as many chances. Neither of us could take the wheel, for if we stopped to switch we'd be utterly out of the running.

I held my breath when a heavily laden coal truck shot out of a cross street—and heaved a sigh of relief when we squeezed by at 50-per by a hair's breadth. Talk about the perils of down-town streets; this suburban traffic is all a man wants at early dusk of a cloudy winter afternoon, especially when chain grocery store fronts and other landmarks are slipping by so fast you can't count 'em.

The sweat was streaming off my forehead, but between the drops I caught a glimpse of the jack rabbit we were chasing just as it turned to the right and out the State highway. We'd lost a lot of ground.

"You say they're headin' out of town now?" he bellowed.

"Check!"

He prodded the kid on the shoulder. "Lay off, son; we're shifting our course."

THE boy lifts his foot off the gas, and we drop down to thirty-five miles. Halloran turns to me, speaking low so the kid won't hear him. Evidently figures there's no use taking unnecessary chances.

"Where's Liberty 0310?" he asks.

"Lodge password or telephone number?" I counters.

"Don't be a fool!" he hisses.

So I tell him: "It's one of the dumpiest rookeries in the burg. Regular hang-out. We call there whenever we have to, but we try to make 'em feel it's a safe hide-out; generally make our pinches several blocks away."

"That's where we go now," he barks. And he turns the kid around in the road.

At nineteen one can get a thrill out of helping cops chase prison fodder, so the kid readily agrees to cart us down town.

"Can't waste a minute," Halloran growls at me when I protest that the taxis are still running.

"What's eatin' ya now?" I glowers. His highhanded tactics are kinda getting on my nerves. "'Fore we went out on this little jaunt you were tellin' me what a whirlwind you were back home; and yet this Morgan guy slips it over on ya like it had been rehearsed.

"Where's all this brainwork you admitted bein' capable of? From what I've seen to date, that guinea's name could be Two-thousand-Thoughts-ahead Morgan, so far as you're concerned. One-and-a-half ain't near enough."

I was getting kind of sore.

"Sorta forget, don't ya, that your hands were just as high as mine?" he jeers.

But quickly enough he comes to earth again.

"We lifted that phone number off the dopey back home," he explains. "The boy didn't kick through with quite everything, but we found it on a card tucked away in the sweatband of his hat. There's no Liberty phone exchange in our burg, so we played a hunch it was here."

"Maybe your speedy friend has the low-down by now," I suggests, "and has shifted hotels."

"A chance," he agrees, "but a slim one. Nobody knows we got the dopey, and he can't get a whisper outside."

"Card have anything else on it?"

"Room number," Halloran grunts, "311."

I guessed that Thought-and-a-half must have things figured out in advance, something like a circus or roadshow. That is, if Halloran's dope was straight.

If it wasn't, we had lost him anyway; and if it was, we'd be waiting for our bird when he swung back into town. I only hoped he wouldn't be too long about finding out that he'd ducked us.

For safety's sake, once we got down town after a speedy dash past all kinds of traffic signals, I stopped the kid several blocks from the dump where Morgan was supposed to bunk.

"Better play safe and call some help," I suggests, as we sidle through the 4.30 P.M. darkness.

"Can't risk wasting a second," Halloran shoots back. "Our friends will cut back here just as soon as they can, if they ever do come. Besides, why have a bunch of signboards out for them to see? They can spot a dick as far as you or I can."

Sounded reasonable to me. Besides, the chief had said responsibility was Halloran's; I was merely reënforcements. If this bimbo was willing to risk shooting it out in a dark room, I'm not the guy to holler yellow.

"Know the back way in?" Halloran mutters at my elbow.

"Who in hell d'yuh think you're with?" I snarls. "I've worn a buzzer long enough to have a little sense, feller!"

Just then we ducked into an alleged office and loft building. He knew enough not to talk back; you can never tell what a guy at the other end of a hallway might overhear.

Up one, two, then four flights of stairs we climbed. We climbed out on the tar and gravel and eased our pant-

ing lungs under the canopy of stars and coal smoke.

WE tried to limp down those iron steps quietly, but we must have made some noise, for a window slid open just a few feet away.

I couldn't see who it was, but neither could he, or she, see us. Knowing the breed of cats that frequent the dump, I didn't feel rude at all in whispering: "Hey, you—we think we've shaken the bulls; but if they come after us, tell 'em we went *down* the fire escape—and they'll beat it out over the roofs."

Whoever it was in the room gave a little chuckle. No offense taken, it seemed. They suffered no illusions as to police ideas on their veracity.

At the third floor we found a hallway window open, and in we slipped. The room wasn't hard to find, even in the semidarkness that must have covered a multitude of sins—some of which smelled rather vigorously.

Risking a dose of hot lead, I tried the door. It was locked. Halloran, the self-confessed fast worker, already had a key out. The second one worked, and I think we both got a big enough thrill when we slid into that room behind a flash light's beam. No sooner had the door shut behind us than Halloran grinned triumphantly.

"All we have to do is wait. There's the evidence." He pointed to a half dozen black knitted neckties strung over the bureau mirror. Thought-and-a-half, I deduced, favored black knits. Well, they are sort of inconspicuous when worn one at a time.

Remembering that the chief's orders originally had been to "run around with him," I gladly assented to the reception plan proposed by this star sleuth we had in our midst. Hadn't he admitted himself, at least ten or twelve times since I had drawn him for a playmate, that he was a fast thinker, and a good one?

And if it was to be part of the plan

that I stand immediately back of him when Thought-and-a-half opened the door, if that kingpin of crookdom ever did open said door, why should I protest? Halloran's two hundred pounds would stop the average bullet, and at least slow down some of the more vigorous projectiles. Me being a man of family, I listen readily to reason.

Halloran figured it out—and, for once, I agreed with him—that there would be but one comparatively safe spot in all that room should a gunman bust in across the threshold. As the door itself would bang against the sidewall when full opened, that position was automatically wiped off the books. No one wants to be caught behind a door if the intruder decides first to kick it wide open, and then shower lead on whatever keeps the porcelain knob from crashing into the plaster.

That left only two walls against which to brace your back—unless you cared to hide under the bed. I once helped sweep up a dick who thought he'd wait beneath an Ostermoor for a certain party; never for mine!

If you selected the wall that would be on the entrant's left, and there happened to be a hall light aglow over his shoulder, chances were you'd eat lead in a hurry. And Thought-and-a-half was pretty skookum with a rod. I had already decided the left wall was not so good, when Halloran informs me in a tense whisper of something I would have done anyway, if left alone.

"We'll back against the wall just opposite the door," he squeaks, "and dodge most of the light that may flood in when he enters. I'll work the flash light. You stand right behind me, and between the two of us we ought to get that guy."

Heroic stuff, thinks I; and snaps out: "Did you lock that door after you?"

"Hell, no," he confesses, and tip-toes across the floor to rectify the error. Wouldn't the coroner have had

a fine mess on his hands if our friend Thought-and-a-half found he wouldn't need his key!

That was the longest half hour I ever spent. It got sort of tiresome, standing there in one position. And we had to stay quiet or else the party might leave a sour taste in our mouths. - But listening for noises put the old ear right in tune. I was hearing everything that happened, and some things that weren't. Occasionally a pair of feet would catfoot warily through the building somewhere. I was listening to such a pair on the floor above when suddenly it seemed the hum of street traffic increased. The street door had opened; two persons were coming up the stairs.

I nudged Halloran, and we wiped the sweat off our palms so there'd be no chance of a gun butt slipping at a critical moment. I sensed that this particular pair of moving feet meant action for us.

And I was right.

The *slop, slop, slop* of leather soles on well-worn carpeting kept coming our way, up two flights of stairs and then down the hall toward the room in which we were. Halloran's big bulk was quivering. Give him credit for having courage; it wasn't fear, but the suspense and excitement of it all that jelly-fished his bulky muscles. The man's nerves were right on edge. He was shaking as bad as—as bad as—aw, hell, you've been nervous yourself; you know how I felt, right about that time!

OF a sudden there came, through the thin door, a grunted, "Lay off that match. What if there was somebody in the room?"

To which a more suppliant voice made answer: "Not a chance. We ditched 'em proper, and they can't know about this dump!"

But Number One, and I knew it was Thought-and-a-half the way Halloran fidgeted when he heard the voice.

naturally ruled the roost. There was no sound of striking matches.

Instead, a soft hand touched the doorknob, which rattled faintly. After that test, a key rasped in the lock.

Then slowly, so slowly that it seemed ages, the door swung inward in the near-total darkness.

I felt Halloran's back muscles contract as he swung his left arm upward—his left hand held the flash light.

Then his growling command:

"Stick 'em up there, Morgan!"

Immediately the doorway was flooded in a circle of light that revealed a nervously alert figure with a wicked-looking automatic clutched in one tense hand—a hand never known to miss.

I almost groaned aloud. Halloran, the poor fat-head, instead of holding the light at arm's length to the left, where it would decoy possible return fire, had it clutched tightly to his belly.

Thought-and-a-half didn't wait an instant. A purple-orange jet of fire almost a mile long and bright as Halley's comet streaked from his gun muzzle, and my ears rang with a report that, echoed in the small room, sounded like a complete explosion of the DuPont powder works.

Almost simultaneously a gun roared under my nose, and I knew that Halloran had returned the fire. I was about to pull the trigger of my own weapon when I saw the bandit chief's pistol fly from his hand, and he stood for a photographic moment as if paralyzed.

With a roar I charged across the room, pushing Halloran's two hundred pounds ahead of me. But he had caught the same thing I had seen: Morgan's gun arm was numb from the shock of having his gat knocked from his hand by Halloran's bullet. Unable to fire at us without hitting his buddy, Thought-and-a-half's confederate turned to flee as he saw us hurtle across the small space. But he didn't quite clear the scene of action.

Three bodies—Halloran's and mine, pushing Thought-and-a-half ahead of us—crashed through the doorway and into him. The bellow that startled from his throat died a borning as he banged against the opposite wall in the hallway.

Two or three swings with our clubbed guns, and we had a pretty tame pair of birds on our hands.

Morgan, the leader, was first to recover.

"Well, that's that," he snarled, "but how in hell I missed potting you when you flashed that light is beyond me! I savvy this copper trick of holding the flash light out to the left, and I always plug for an arm's length to the opposite side and know I'll hit the body. But to-night I didn't connect." He almost moaned the last sentence.

Halloran threw out his chest. He basked in the glow of an implied compliment. But he couldn't help rubbing it in.

"You were up against a boy just a little speedier in the brain pan, Thought-and-a-half! I figured you'd shoot that way, and I held it up against my body to throw you off. Just goes to show there's almost some one who can think a little faster!"

I almost believed him. Then, suddenly, I caught sight of something interesting. "Fast thinking, hell!" I cried out. "I'd say it was no thinking at all!"

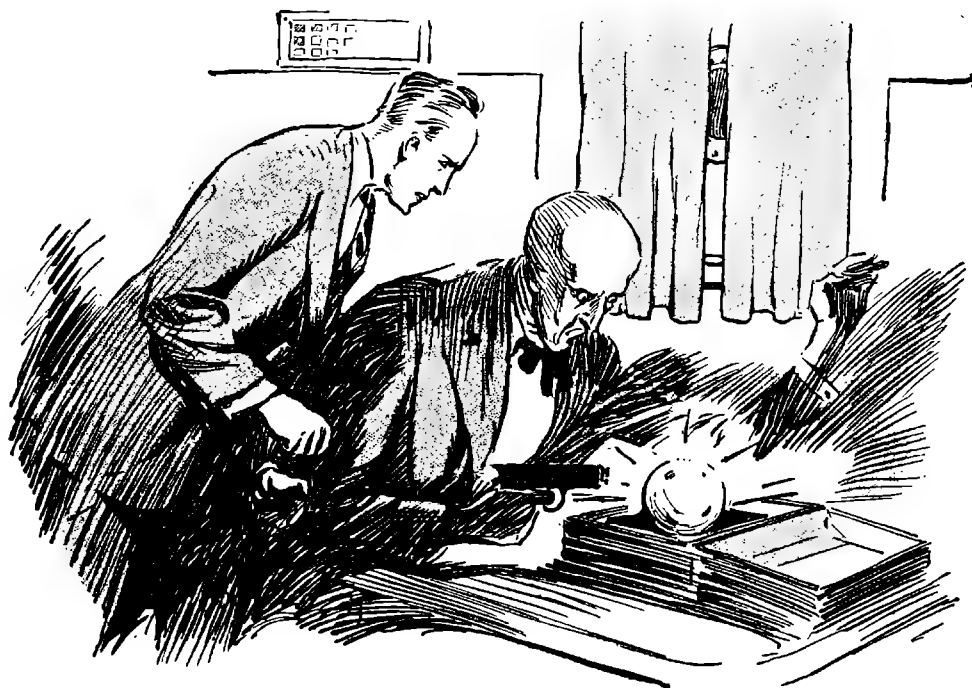
And I pointed to the front of his vest.

There, suspended by a tiny gleaming rope, hung Halloran's flash light. The darned thing had caught in his ornate watch chain, and he couldn't have moved it if he'd tried!

But that was the only thing I said. Let the lying old blowhard take all the credit for something he never meant to do. If it hadn't been for his thick skull, and that watch chain, I'd have been dead as slavery.

I should complain!

THE END.



"Look into the fire of truth!" Grimaldi commanded

The Spectral Passenger

The pirates are defeated; but Lionel Wing finds, quite suddenly, that danger still treads the gory decks of the Stella Maris

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Press Agent," "The Golden Burden," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LIONEL WING, exporter, is ordered to take a sea voyage for his health; and the financial problem is solved when one Hernando Sortez commissions him to take a verbal message to Jaime Portala, who lives in a suburb of Rio de Janeiro. The message is, "Let not the sun set until the moon rises."

Aboard the slow *Stella Maris*, Wing runs into a series of murders. First, a Brazilian, Montana, is found stabbed, in Wing's cabin. A Senhora Veliza, who came aboard with Montana, is strangled in her cabin. An attempt is

made to kill Wing with a *bola*, an Argentine neck-breaking weapon of two lead balls fastened with a short catgut cord.

Grimaldi, a hairless, repulsive giant who reminds Wing of an octopus, has foretold disaster, and takes ghastly delight in each one. He identifies Montana as a cousin of the president of Brazil, and names his acquaintances aboard—Sousa, who is attentive to Miss Wenham; Gratz, a coffee merchant; Issoto, Jewish jeweler of Rio; and Augustus Wenham, a Spanish-American business man of Rio. Cap-

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for February 9.

tain Grigsby and Purser Sprowle fear Grimaldi as a jinx, telling how men who had offended him on past voyages died mysteriously. Wing suspects Grimaldi, but the man always has an alibi.

An attempt is made to gas Wing's cabin. His friend Hank Gifford, an ex-cowboy, suspects Montana was killed by mistake for Wing; and Maria Wenham warns him that somebody aboard knows of his message from Sortez.

Grimaldi secretly summons Wenham, and forces the old man to surrender a document Senhora Veliza gave him to deliver in Rio. Grimaldi finds the document is blank, but Wenham does not know it. Wenham later is found dead—perhaps a suicide.

The *Stella Maris*, running under forced draft with its cargo of five millions in gold, is caught in a storm; and under cover of the confusion, a band of New York gunmen seize the ship, imprisoning the officers, and locking the passengers in the deck house.

But Wing manages to engage the gunman guarding the deck house in conversation, and after a struggle, he overpowers him. Freeing the ship's officers, he and they attack the pirates. In the mêlée, Wing sees Sousa throw a *bola* at Captain Grigsby, and Wing captures him. The officers, reënforced by stokers and crew, kill many of the pirates and capture the others.

Wing goes below, to find Grimaldi in his room. The ogre grinningly informs him that by saving the gold, he has gone against the interests of his employer, Sortez.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SUICIDE.

AS Wing was aware that he was wanted above and as he was filled with curiosity to hear the confession of Owen and Sousa, he devoted little thought at the moment to

the half-revelations of Grimaldi, but hurried his toilet and then hastened up to the captain's quarters.

In his twenty minutes' absence all evidence of the battle on the boat deck had been removed. Ten wounded sailors were being cared for in the hospital and adjacent cabin. Six slightly injured pirates were in the brig, a dozen dead men had been carried below decks. The second officer was walking the bridge and the captain, again in uniform, sat in his cabin.

Sousa had been locked in the chart-room and Owen was still under lock and key in the stateroom.

Grigsby rose and shook the passenger's hand with great cordiality.

"In the first place," he said, "I thank you for what you have done, Mr. Wing. Mr. Henderson has told me how you forced your way out of the passenger quarters, single-handed captured Owen and Kregan, released Henderson and then affected our release. I consider that the successful outcome of the affair is entirely due to you and the company will thank you in a more material manner than is possible for me."

"That's all right," Wing said, flushing and uneasy. "This man Sousa, captain, is the *bola* thrower. I think he can shed a light upon the murder of Montana and Senhora Veliza."

"By Jove, in the excitement I had forgotten completely about those crimes. First we'll question Owen. Come in, Mr. Sprowle." The purser had joined them, and the skipper unlocked the door. "Come out, captain," he said with heavy sarcasm.

Owen emerged. He was minus his uniform coat, for Grigsby already forced him to hand it over. He was sullen and frightened.

"What's your real name?" demanded Grigsby.

"If you need it, it's James Follen."

"Ha! You were captain of the tramp steamer, Morgan Drew, sunk in fair weather off the Azores. Suspect-

ed of being sunk for her insurance. The board of trade took away your license."

"You have it right," said the man.

"Where did you intend to sink this steamer?"

"I had no such intentions," said Owen eagerly. "I was going to beach her on Zagos Island about ten hours from here. No lives were to be lost."

"Hum," said the skipper. "A lot of lives were lost. I suppose you know you'll swing for this."

"I would not have permitted fighting," declared Owen. "I was a prisoner." He threw a vicious glance at Lionel Wing.

"Your only chance is to testify for the prosecution. Want to do it?"

"I'll tell all I know."

"Very good. Who hired you?"

"Listen, sir. I was down on my luck in New York. I didn't have a penny when I was approached about this."

"Who approached you?"

"This American, Louis Peterson. He promised me one hundred thousand dollars for my share and ten thousand was placed in the bank in my name before I sailed."

"Was he the chief? Didn't you meet anybody else?"

"No, sir. He conducted all the negotiations. He needed me and two navigating officers. I found them on the beach like myself. He brought his own men on board, placed several men in your crew as firemen, deck hands, and stewards. I only met them at a secret meeting on the main deck three days ago. I was assured that no injury would be done to crew or passengers."

"Was this fellow Sousa in your crew?" asked Wing eagerly.

"He joined the night before we took the ship. We only had twenty-one men."

"Which of you scoundrels threw a rope around my neck?" demanded Grigsby growing red as he thought of the indignity.

"That was Louis Peterson and a steward named Lightman. Louis used to be a cowboy in Texas."

"If he wasn't dead, I'd make him sweat for that," declared the skipper.

"How did you persuade Sousa to sign up?" asked Wing. "Same arguments you used on me?"

Owen nodded. "I fancy Louis told him that he was doomed with the other passengers if he didn't."

"But you just said you had no intention of drowning the ship's crew and passengers," shouted the skipper.

"It was just a threat sir," the man hedged hastily.

"How did you expect to escape capture if you let us live?"

"The world is large."

"Well, I don't believe you. Twenty people went down on the Morgan Drew. You are a damned scoundrel, Follen."

"You are in a position to abuse me," said the man hopelessly.

"Your confession amounts to placing the leadership on a man who is dead," declared Grigsby. "That won't help you. Have you anything else to say?"

"I've told all I know."

"Take him down and lock him in the brig with the other pirates, Mr. Sprowle."

WHEN he was gone Grigsby unlocked the chartroom door and ordered Sousa to enter. The Brazilian was livid and his eyes were like those of a terrified rat.

"Now," thundered Grigsby. "You were a member of this band of pirates, were you not?"

"I was not, sir."

"You lie. Owen has just informed us that you joined them last night."

"It's untrue." His voice was hoarse with fright.

"Then why did you throw a *bola* at me?" roared the captain.

"I thought you were one of the pirates."

The captain stared at him. This was possible. He had not been in uniform.

"How did you get out of the passenger accommodations?" demanded Wing sharply.

Sousa looked blank, then lost what composure he possessed and burst into childish tears.

"You'll hang as sure as I'm a living man. I have the right to hang you myself," shouted the captain.

"I'll confess. Don't hang me. You can't hang me for what I did." He began to talk wildly in Portuguese.

"Confess then and be quick about it. I'll give you a minute," cried Grigsby with a triumphant look at Wing.

"I am a ruined man. I am in the hands of a remorseless, unscrupulous devil," sobbed Sousa. "I was his helpless tool. When I was invited to join in this mutiny and was promised fifty thousand dollars I accepted because it was a way of escape."

"Why did you throw the *bola* at me on the second day of the voyage?" demanded Wing excitedly.

"He forced me to."

"Who? Grimaldi?"

Sousa looked astonished. "No, Issoto."

"Issoto!" exclaimed both Wing and Grigsby at once.

"Issoto?" repeated the captain. "I never thought of him. Good Heavens!"

"Did Issoto kill Montana and Senhora Veliza?" Wing demanded.

Sousa shook his head. "Not Montana. But the *senhora* he strangled."

"But—but why should he strangle the poor woman?" stammered the astounded captain.

"She was his married daughter," explained Sousa. "He went to her cabin that night and found her in great sorrow because of the death of Senhor Montana. She confessed to her father that she had been Montana's mistress, and then Issoto strangled her for being unchaste. He is like that."

"The filthy old brute," commented the skipper. "That's one murder ex-

plained. Do you know who killed Montana?"

"No, *senhor*."

Captain Grigsby rang just as Sprowle returned. "Another prisoner to go into the brig," he said. "He has just explained who killed Senhora Veliza. It was her own father, that brute Issoto. Lock Sousa up and come back. Then we'll go after Issoto."

Sprowle turned over the prisoner to waiting stewards and returned immediately.

"Things are clearing up," he said.

"I can't understand why Issoto wanted me killed," said Wing, "unless—" He was silent for he remembered what Grimaldi had said. Issoto must be the person who was interested in preventing Wing from delivering his message to Senhor Portala.

"Get the master at arms," commanded Grigsby to the purser. "We'll put the handcuffs on one murderer at least. Most likely he killed Montana."

THE master at arms, a steward who officiated on the rare occasions when such a functionary was needed on shipboard, had accompanied Sousa to the already overcrowded lazaret.

When he returned the captain and purser started with him for the stateroom occupied by Issoto, and Wing followed because he was so absorbed in the drama which was approaching its dénouement that he could not do otherwise.

They found the door locked with the key on the inside, and the inmate made no response to their repeated rapping and shouts.

"Send for the carpenter," Grigsby ordered. "Something the matter here."

In a few minutes the carpenter was at work on the door which he forced open with a jimmy. Grigsby entered, followed by Sprowle, and they gaped at the sight of Issoto lying in the lower berth apparently asleep.

Lionel Wing stood in the doorway, and something immediately gripped his throat in a manner that was familiar. His eyes rested upon an affair resembling a fire extinguisher which stood at the head of the berth.

"Poison gas," he shouted. "Out of here quick."

He grasped the captain by one arm and the purser by the other and drew them out of the cabin and the narrow passage, into the companionway.

"Have a steward cover his own face with a wet towel and open the port," Wing advised. "Issoto's committed suicide. It was he who tried to overpower me with that stuff, just as I told you, Mr. Sprowle."

"Suicide!" muttered Grigsby. "He must have known we had captured Sousa and he would confess."

"That's right," said Sprowle. "Remember, Wing? He asked us why he had arrested Sousa when I spoke to the passengers on the salon deck. He went right down below and turned on his private gas supply. Well, he's out of reach."

"You mean to say that contraption at the head of the berth was a poison gas machine?" demanded Grigsby. "We might have been poisoned."

"That's why I dragged you out of the stateroom," Wing explained. "This man Issoto has twice attempted my life, captain. The first time was when he sent Sousa to *bola* me. You had heard about that from Mr. Sprowle. The second I didn't tell you because it seemed utterly impossible. He filled my stateroom with gas, operating through the ventilation hole from an inner cabin. That's why I knew how Issoto died."

Grigsby looked bewildered. "It's all damnably mysterious," he said. "Here, steward. Wet a towel and cover your mouth and nose with it, then rush in and open the porthole in that room. Start the electric fan. Any danger of its poisoning us out here or the other passengers?"

"I don't think so," Wing replied. "In a closed room it is deadly, but mixing with fresh air causes it to lose its strength very quickly."

"It's all beyond me," sighed the skipper. "Sprowle, have Roundsby inspect the body when it's safe to enter the stateroom. Come with me, Mr. Wing. I want to go over things with you."

Lionel followed the captain above, and in a few minutes was again seated in his cabin. This time Grigsby produced a bottle of whisky and poured drinks which Wing appreciated. The excitement of the day had brought its natural reaction in a man who was not yet at the top of his form.

"**N**OW correct me if I am wrong," said Grigsby. "The afternoon we sailed we found a dead man in your room. He was identified as an important Brazilian business man who lived in New York; he was not a passenger, yet he was murdered on this ship shortly after sailing. We find that he accompanied the Senhora Veliza to the ship, but told his office force he was coming to say goodby to Mr. Wenham. Mr. Wenham denied it. Correct so far?"

Wing nodded.

"That night a woman shrieked, and when we located the cabin from which the cry came Senhora Veliza had been choked to death. According to Sousa, she was the married daughter of Issoto and was strangled by him when he discovered her mourning for Montana and learned she was his mistress."

"Right."

"Next, somebody throws a *bola* at you and misses you by a hair's breadth—in expert hands it's a deadly weapon. You captured Sousa on the boat-deck about to slay me with one of the damn things, and he confesses to us he threw one at you under orders from Issoto. Immediately we go to arrest Issoto and find he has committed sui-

cide by poison gas, and it develops that he had previously used the stuff on you and nearly killed you.

"Thus we may assume that both attacks upon you were inspired by Issoto. For want of a better reason we assume that he killed himself because he expected that Sousa would incriminate him."

"Yes."

Grigsby pulled at his mustache and pursed his rather full lips. "What was his animus against you?" he demanded.

"Blessed if I know. Isn't this possible, captain? He killed Montana, boasted of it to his daughter, and it was then that she revealed that she was Montana's mistress and threatened to betray her father. He strangled her to save his own life."

"Maybe. We can't pin the death of Montana on him yet. I wish we could."

"It's as good a theory as any."

"Well, pass on. Somewhere in this vicinity is a ship which expects to meet us and take on board our gold. She's got a crew who are in this plot. Now you can't charter a seagoing vessel and man her with men willing to commit piracy without great expense. We have Follen's statement that ten thousand dollars was placed in the bank in his name before he took passage on this steamship.

"I should say that at least a hundred thousand dollars has been expended upon the enterprise. Of course that is nothing compared to the prize they were after, five millions in gold, but it's a lot of money nevertheless."

"I get you," said Wing. "You don't believe that it was plotted and financed by this gunman Louis Peterson, whom Follen calls the chief of the gang."

"I doubt if a man rich enough to finance the affair would risk his neck by coming out into the open," said the captain.

Lionel, who had considered the cap-

tain an honest but rather a stupid man, opened his eyes at this exhibition of logic.

"You're dead right, sir, he would not," he declared. "And you just said you didn't think that knowledge that Sousa had been made a prisoner was sufficient reason for Issoto to commit suicide. But if it were Issoto who planned this whole affair and financed it, if he were the secret chief, he would expect Sousa to betray him, and he would know he could not escape hanging."

Grigsby thumped on the table with his fist. "That's it. You've got it," he declared.

"Only, if Issoto knew that the ship would be taken, and if he plotted to sink her with all on board, why take the trouble to try to have me killed when I would naturally go down with the ship? And we know now that he was responsible for the attempt on me."

"What made you think of that?" groaned the skipper. "It had seemed plain sailing. I see that we'll have to apply to Sousa and Follen what you Yankees call the 'third degree.'"

"THIS gold, captain—do you know the purpose of the shipment?"

"No reason why I shouldn't tell you. It's going to the Scotch bank."

"But why?"

"I don't know. I suspect it has something to do with a concession. I heard a rumor that the Brazilian government has discovered diamond fields upon public land somewhere in the interior, and that a British syndicate is after them, but that's only guesswork."

"Isn't it unusual to send gold in a case like that? I thought gold was only shipped between governments or from one great bank to another?"

"All I know is that this gold was specified and must be laid down on a certain day, or some big deal is off. It

is unusual. This is the first time this ship ever carried a large shipment of it, and we only got it because the mail boat was laid up in dry dock in New York."

"I'm much obliged, sir. The whole thing is very mysterious. May I ask what you are going to do about this pirate ship which is hovering about?"

"Show her a clean pair of heels," smiled the captain. "I doubt if she is equipped with guns so that she could attack us, but I'll give every vessel I sight a wide berth. My business is to deliver this gold. If our wireless man were not one of the pirates I'd have warships on the track of that vessel in short order, but I can't trust him at the instrument. He might bring the pirate ship down on us. I can't express how greatly I am in your debt, sir."

Wing stood up. "It's possible that Sousa can tell us why Issoto wanted to put me out of the way," he said. "And you may force out of him what connection Issoto had with the pirates."

"I'll have you and Sprowle present when we put the screws on him. Just now I've got to see about a number of things. We've a score of dead men to put overboard in the morning. Poor Wenham, Issoto, some of our brave fellows, and the bloody pirates who were killed in the battle."

"May I visit Mr. Gifford?"

"Certainly. Tell Dr. Roundsby I gave you permission."

Wing left the captain's quarters with his mind busy upon the information given him regarding the destination of the gold.

Senhor Portala, Wing hazarded, was a political boss who had agreed to turn over the diamond concession in exchange for five millions. He had demanded gold coin because he hoped the British corporation could not deliver it in time. Most likely the concession was more valuable than he anticipated when he made the bargain, or else a better offer was in the wind.

Sortez was his representative in New York, and Sortez had the offer. Because the affair was illicit, because this gold was a gigantic bribe, he dared make use neither of the mails or cables lest enemies intercept the messages. He dared not even trust code messages. That would explain "Let not the sun set until the moon rises."

Suspecting that Wing was carrying a message which would cause Portala to evade his agreement upon the delivery of the gold, Issoto, who was a diamond merchant and perhaps interested in the British syndicate which was shipping the gold, had tried to put the American out of the way, first through his tool Sousa, and later by personally administering the poison gas.

It was a plausible theory, but the weak point was that if Issoto were concerned in closing the deal for the diamond fields, he could not be the pirate chief who had planned to defeat his own ends by stealing the gold shipment in mid-ocean. And Wing knew absolutely that he had tried to bring about his own death, while it was only a theory that he might have been head of the piratical conspiracy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAIR OF THE OCTOPUS.

AT eight o'clock that morning Captain Follen, alias Owen, with Louis Peterson and his crew had taken the ship. Before eleven o'clock the *Stella Maris* had been retaken, and at twelve-thirty the passengers were summoned to lunch, to find everything functioning normally.

Seasickness is so much a mental condition that the men and women who had suffered from it violently during the night and in the early morning had forgotten their illness when they found themselves in the hands of pirates and during the progress of the battle raging above their heads on the boat deck, but

now, despite the comparatively calm weather, the disease recurred in many cases, and the significance of the half dozen vacant chairs which had been occupied by passengers in the plot to capture the gold was not observed by the few who did not enter the salon.

Grimaldi was there, and Lionel found himself alone with the ghost-man, for Gifford was in the hospital and Owen in the lazaret. Sprowle undoubtedly had too much to do to present himself at table. In his anxiety to secure information regarding the plot, Grimaldi fawned on the young American, and Wing's suspicions re-awakened. His anxiety to know what Sousa had revealed to Captain Grigsby and his gruesome curiosity regarding the death of Issoto finally exasperated Wing, who was careful to tell him nothing of any importance.

"You and Captain Grigsby are great friends. Why don't you ask him these questions?" Wing demanded.

Grimaldi smirked. "I am aware that the captain is tremendously busy. Later, doubtless, he will tell me all I wish to know. Is it your opinion that it was Issoto who inspired this mutiny?"

"Is it yours?" he parried.

"Yes. Sousa undoubtedly was his go-between. You may be sure that the conspirators would not have accepted him as a recruit at the last minute. Issoto had ample opportunity to know that this gold shipment would be sent to Rio Janeiro. Sousa's father is a rich man, but the fellow has been a great spendthrift, and that is how he got into Issoto's clutches."

"Was Issoto a money lender? I thought he was a jeweler."

"He was both."

"You are a money lender yourself, I am informed."

Grimaldi spread out his claws. "I have obliged my friends. It is not my principal business."

"Can you answer me this?" Wing demanded. "If Issoto was the chief

of this crowd of pirates, and if, as we both deduced, the intention was to scuttle the ship and send us all to the bottom, why should he send Sousa to try to kill me with a *bola*?"

"Perhaps that was Sousa's own idea," grinned Grimaldi.

It often happens that a person who strikes one as hideous and repulsive at first becomes less objectionable in appearance as one gets accustomed to him, and Grimaldi's countenance no longer awakened loathing in the soul of Lionel Wing. His dislike and distrust of the man, however, persisted, though Grimaldi's conduct, so far, seemed irreproachable.

In the stirring affairs of the day he had played no part, had been frank to admit that he was a physical coward, and the young American now saw the injustice of his suspicion that Grimaldi had endeavored to kill him with poison gas. Issoto had been the gas operator.

Grimaldi had advised him honestly, so it seemed, when he had resorted to him in desperation that morning, and he had talked frankly and apparently with sincerity. He had a ghoulisn streak; got a thrill out of horrible crimes; but so did all the readers of the New York tabloids. He was as curious and as malicious as any feline, but he had no more to do with the gold plot than Wing himself. Lionel was now inclined to doubt that he was very well informed regarding his own mission, but just had put two and two together like any old gossip.

He saluted Grimaldi pleasantly when he left the table and sought the hospital where Gifford had been taken, to find that he had been removed to his own cabin since there were others with more serious wounds to fill the little establishment of Dr. Roundsby.

VOICES came from Gifford's stateroom as he approached it, and he was thrilled to see not only Doris Drexel but Maria Wenham.

"Her mother was asleep, and I

"dragged the poor kid out with me," explained Doris. "She's chaperoning me here.

"How's the conquering hero?"

"If you mean me," Wing responded, "you're addressing the wrong man. Pay homage to Hank there. He killed the pirate chief."

"We'd still be locked in that dungeon below and the pirates would be ruling the roost if it wasn't for Wing," replied Gifford, who was sitting up in his berth. He had a little color in his cheeks now.

"How do you feel?" Wing asked Maria as he took her hand and sat down beside her.

She returned the pressure of his hand and smiled faintly. "I'm still feeling very badly," she said. "To think that poor father—" She could not complete her sentence, and Wing passed his arm around her waist and drew her head upon his shoulder, where she wept silently. Doris, who was seated on the edge of Hank's berth, gave them smiling benediction.

"I'm doing nicely, thank you, though you didn't ask," grinned Hank.

Wing looked contrite. "I beg your pardon. It's obvious you are not badly hurt."

"Just a clean little wound. The shoulder will be stiff for a week or so. I had a narrow escape. What are the developments, Chuck?" he demanded.

Lionel told him everything.

"So our boy friend Sousa joined the pirates," commented Doris. "You didn't know he was paying me attentions as well as Maria, Hank."

"I should be jealous of him," Gifford said significantly; and Wing knew they had arrived at an understanding.

"Look here, Chuck," continued the wounded man. "You were certain that Grimaldi had played the gas hose on you. Now you know it was Issoto."

"No doubt of it."

"And it was Sousa who threw the

bola at you. You were certain it must be an Argentine."

"He admitted it. Issoto forced him to do it."

"And Grimaldi hasn't committed any crimes at all."

"Apparently not."

"He's made up for the heavy villain, and yet he's just a walking gentleman," observed Doris. "Think of that horrible old man strangling his own daughter."

"Maria, darling," Wing said, suddenly remembering the warning she had sent him, "where did you get the information that it was known on board I had had an interview with a man named Sortez?"

The dark girl lifted her orchid face from his shoulder. "Oh, that? I heard Senhor Grimaldi telling Senhor Issoto."

Her remark created a sensation.

The three looked at one another in silence for a second.

"He's no walking gentleman," observed Doris.

"After we'd given him a clean bill of health," commented Gifford.

"Grimaldi knew it all right, because he admitted to me that he knew it," said Wing slowly. "He said that the capture of the gold was serving Sortez's interests, that he did not want it to arrive in Rio on time."

"Hum," grunted the one time correspondence school detective. "Old Issoto was busy trying to put you out of the way, which means he wanted the gold to be delivered. That he strangled Senhora Veliza we have only the statement of Sousa to depend upon. Grimaldi claims he was the secret leader of the pirates, and Sousa carried his orders to this fellow Peterson, whom I had a duel with."

"It doesn't make sense," said Lionel.

"No," said the wounded man.

"You don't know Issoto pumped the gas into your stateroom. The man was masked. Sousa says he obeyed Is-

soto's orders when he chucked the *bola* at you—"

"But Issoto himself committed suicide with the gas."

"Yes," said Gifford slowly. "Or was murdered."

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Wing.

Doris's eyes were dilated with excitement.

"I mean Grimaldi. Montana was found dead in your room; he might have been killed in Grimaldi's room and carried into your berth through the connecting door. Grimaldi might have used the gas on you, and he might have turned it on for Issoto. Grimaldi may be the head of this gold plot, and if that's the case the trouble isn't over yet."

"Did Grimaldi and Issoto seem friendly?" asked Lionel of Maria. "Just what was the conversation you overheard?"

"My father had rung for the steward and had no response, so I volunteered to go out and find him. I opened my door and stepped into the side passage and the two men were standing in the main passage. One of them was Grimaldi and the other was Issoto. Grimaldi was saying in Portuguese: 'Sortez has two strings to his bow, and permit me to direct your attention to this American Senhor Wing.' I said, 'Pardon me!' and pushed by them, and then they separated."

"You see," exclaimed Gifford, "Grimaldi tipped off Issoto to go after you. The big haddock is in back of everything that has happened."

"What's this?" peeped a shrill little voice. Dr. Roundsby stood in the doorway and wagged a fat finger at them.

"You must all go," he squeaked. "I can't have my patient excited."

"I'm all right. I want them to stay," protested the brush salesman.

"No," denied the doctor. "They may come to see you to-morrow. It's a regular tea party here."

"Come on," said Doris. "The doc is the boss. I'll be round early to-morrow, Hank, or maybe I can drop in for a little while this evening. How about it, doc?" She vamped the stupid looking physician shamelessly, and he yielded.

"Perhaps, perhaps; but you must go now."

The trio said *au revoir* and left the stateroom.

Doris slipped into her own cabin, and Lionel led Maria to her door. The passage was empty, and he yielded to an uncontrollable impulse.

He bent and kissed her. The girl put up her lips like a sweet infant, then passion swept through her, and her arms lifted to his neck. In this attitude Mrs. Wenham, opening the door, found them.

The young people separated guiltily under the reproachful eye of the pale, bereaved woman.

"So this is what has happened," she said slowly.

"I love him, mother," Maria said, her face crimson.

"And do you love my daughter? Do you wish to marry her?" she asked Wing.

"I want nothing so much in the world," he said fervently.

She gazed at him, and her eyes filled with tears. "Come inside," she said. "Please sit down, Mr. Wing. It's all right, Maria."

"I am aware that this is no time—" began Lionel.

She lifted a thin white hand.

"Are you willing to help us, Maria and me?" she asked eagerly.

"Of course I am. Anything I can do."

"Mr. Wing, my husband died of a broken heart. He was the soul of honor and he had been unfaithful to a trust."

"Mother!" gasped Maria.

"Until this voyage we never had secrets and he confessed to me the night before he died what had happened to

him. On this ship is an inhuman monster—”

“Grimaldi!” exclaimed Wing.

MRS. WENHAM nodded. “My husband went to New York on a tremendously important mission. He accomplished it and he was bringing back to Rio a document of great importance. This creature, Grimaldi, forced him to give it to him. Mr. Wing, we shall land in Rio de Janeiro penniless. If we are able to deliver the document for my husband, we shall receive a very substantial sum of money and keep faith with the people who sent him to New York. I want you to get it for me.”

“No, mother,” protested Maria. “I’m afraid—”

Wing was on his feet. “I’ll get it,” he declared.

Maria clung to him. “I won’t have him endangered,” she protested. “Mother, I love him. You shouldn’t—”

“Forgive me, Mr. Wing. I have no right to ask you to do this,” said Mrs. Wenham remorsefully.

“Listen, Maria,” pleaded Lionel, “Grimaldi can’t scare me.”

“No, no, no,” she protested.

“Will you tell me something? Has this document anything to do with a Senhor Portala in Rio?” he asked.

She looked astonished. “How did you know?” she demanded.

“Never mind. I’ll get it.”

Sortez had two strings to his bow, he thought as he left the cabin after kissing Maria lingeringly under her mother’s eyes. He was one and Wenham was the other. So Grimaldi was responsible for Wenham’s death and the attempts on himself.

His first impressions of the man were right, he was a thing of evil. He was the arch plotter on the *Stella Maris*, responsible for the score of violent deaths which had occurred on board, this man of perfect alibis. Well, at last he had something on Grimaldi.

In his right-hand coat pocket was the

automatic which he had used in the battle on the boat deck and this would be needed. He would cover the fiend with it, force him to return Wenham’s document and confess all his crimes. His face was burning hot; he was feverish and did not know it. No man could go through what this youth had experienced during the past five or six hours and be quite normal; and Wing was only three weeks out of a hospital.

He knocked on Grimaldi’s door.

“Who is there?” came the familiar creaking tones of the Octopus Man.

“Lionel Wing,” he said loudly. “I want to speak to you.”

“Ah, just a minute. I was lying down. Always glad to talk to our young hero. Now just a minute more, Mr. Wing. I’ll unlock the door and get back into my berth. Then you can come in. When I say ‘enter.’”

He heard him moving around, then he heard the key turn in the door.

“Come right in, Mr. Wing. I was about to send for you.”

He pushed the door open and entered. Something dropped from above and wrapped around his neck.

It was strangling him. Grinning like a fiend, Grimaldi pushed the door to, then threw his weight on a rope, and the youth was lifted to tiptoes and then off again. He was being hanged.

Grimaldi had improvised a gallows by means of a hook above the door; he had set his trap and Lionel Wing had stepped into it.

As he was lifted up Lionel fumbled for his pocket, but the claw of Grimaldi darted out and withdrew the automatic.

“Ah,” he exclaimed. “Then I shall not need my ingenious garroting machine. That is well, because I hate physical exertion.”

HE covered Wing with the weapon and released his hold of the rope.

The half-strangled youth tugged at the loop and loosened it. Grimaldi lifted it off.

"Go sit on the sofa," he commanded, and Lionel meekly obeyed.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

The cadaver grinned his sepulchral grin.

"It means that the time has come for us to understand each other. I was about to send a steward to ask you to step into my parlor, as your old nursery rime goes. You anticipated me."

Wing saw that he was fully dressed and had not been lying in his berth.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I wish you to repeat the message given you by Senhor Sortez for Senhor Don Jaime Portala."

"I'm damned if I will!"

"I think you will. Otherwise you die."

"The way you killed Montana, and Venham, and Issoto, and the Senhora Veliza," Wing spat.

"Oh, you have divined so much! You are a remarkable man. I did not kill the senhora. An angry father did that."

"You can kill me, but I won't tell."

"We'll see, we'll see."

Using the left hand he set up his folding table, then, dropping the curtain over the porthole, opened his black case and displayed to the astonished eyes of the American, the crystal ball. He drew up a camp stool on the opposite side of the table and set the crystal ball between them. Wing was debating whether he should shout for help. The scream of the Senhora Veliza had not saved her. Grimaldi was a maniac beyond question; his mania was homicide, he was cunning and ingenious. He would shoot on the outcry and then make his escape during the few moments it would take the officers to locate the shot. Why not pretend to be hypnotised and rattle off some gibberish as his message?

"Now," hissed the crazy man. "Look into the ball. Look into the fire of truth. Look! Look! Look!" His

voice died away. His own eyes were fixed on the crystal ball. The claw holding the gun lay on the table.

"Yes," whispered Wing, "I am looking." He leaned forward.

His left hand fell upon the talon which held the automatic, he wrenched it away. Grimaldi caught his wrist. They struggled, the table went over and the ball crashed to the deck. It missed the rug, and it shattered upon the hard oak boarding.

Grimaldi uttered a howl of despair at the destruction of the crystal ball. At the same moment, Wing succeeded in turning the gun toward him and pulling the trigger. Three or four bullets tore into the body of the Octopus Man, he crumpled to the deck, and Wing, the gun in his hand, watched in horrible fascination as a stream of blood widened into a little pool on the deck. He was a murderer!

The stewards were already in the passageway. They threw open the door. They drew back in horror.

"I killed him. It was in self-defense," babbled Wing, then he also fell to the deck unconscious.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REVELATIONS.

"HE was crazy as a loon, my lad," said Captain Grigsby. "But it's fortunate for you the devil kept a diary. He called it his 'Book of Doom.' For fifteen years he has been keeping a record of people he has caused to die, with all the ghastly details of how he brought it about. If it wasn't for that, you'd be in terrible trouble."

Wing was lying in his berth and Captain Grigsby and Purser Sprowle were in his cabin. It was two hours later. From his swoon he had passed into delirium and had only become normal half an hour before.

"His last record," said Grigsby, "was made only a few minutes before

you came in. He was going to hang you after he extorted from you some secret his crazed mind supposed you possessed. That establishes self-defense. He killed Montana and Issoto and he poisoned Wenham. It was he who tried to dispose of you with poison gas."

"How did he do it?" muttered Wing with a shudder.

"It's all in the diary," said the purser. "He met Montana coming from the cabin of the *senhora* and invited him into his cabin for a drink. The drink was drugged. After the ship sailed he carried the unconscious man into your stateroom through the connecting door, and laid him in your berth, stabbed him to the heart, threw the bloody knife out the porthole and then returned to his own room after which he showed himself on deck. It was he who told Issoto that his daughter was Montana's mistress and showed him a love letter he had taken from the body of Montana, to prove it," added the captain. "The old man went crazy and strangled his daughter. Grimaldi had a perfect alibi for that."

"But where did he get the poison gas?" asked Wing.

"He carried every possible device for killing in his luggage," explained the captain. "In his diary he gloats over the fantastic means he used to bring about death. He even carried disease germs."

"There was method in his madness, too," said the purser. "He usually killed for gain or for revenge for some fancied slight. He sent what he called murderous thought waves after those who got out of his reach and if something eventually caused their death, he wrote down that he had killed them. You remember, Mr. Wing, I told you of a man in Rio who won a lawsuit against him and who afterward hanged himself. In the 'Book of Doom' he confessed that he got into the man's house and fixed up a contrivance like the one he prepared for

you. After the victim was dead he made his escape."

"Did you find a document among his papers which seemed to belong to Mr. Wenham?" Wing asked anxiously.

"Not yet," replied Captain Grigsby. "We haven't had time to go carefully through his effects."

"And had he planned the attempt to capture the gold?"

The captain shook his head. "Apparently that is one crime in which he had no hand. There is no mention of it in the book. Don't let your conscience trouble you for killing that monster, Mr. Wing. He ought to have been boiled in oil."

"Is there anything in this book regarding a man named Hernando Sor-tez?" asked Lionel.

"No," answered the purser. "Not in the last part of the book, anyway. By George, things have cleared up completely, thanks to you. We know who slew those people, we have frustrated the gold plot, and from now on everything will be serene."

Wing felt that a number of things remained to be cleared up, but he said nothing. He was as far as ever from solving the mystery of his message to Portala; Mr. Wenham's document had not been found, nor had Grimaldi's "Book of Doom" explained why he killed Montana and Issoto. The man, of course, was insane, yet his killings were from motive.

"May I get up?" he asked.

"The doctor says to stay in your berth for a few hours. You have over-taxed your strength," the purser said.

"Have you gone completely through his luggage?"

"We went hastily through it."

"Somewhere he has concealed a document stolen from Mr. Wenham. I promised Mrs. Wenham to secure it, and that was why I went to his cabin. May I be present when you go through the man's things again?"

"Certainly," said Captain Grigsby. "Sprowle'll make a thorough search."

They departed and Wing tried to sleep, but his mind was too occupied. When Sprowle called for him he was up and dressed.

THEY entered the cabin of the dead man and for an hour they were busy examining his papers, wearing apparel and boxes containing a variety of articles including a book on poison and a number of deadly vials. It was by accident that Sprowle touched the spring which released the cover of the secret compartment that contained the letter. He picked up the sheet of writing paper and glanced at it, then he began to read it.

"Wait. It may be Wenham's document," Wing objected.

"Can't help it," replied the purser. "It's my business to read everything readable in his effects. By Jove—"

"What is it?"

"Listen."

We know that when the paper was taken from Wenham it was blank and remained blank after chemical treatment by Grimaldi. What Grimaldi did not know was that it took some time after its treatment for the characters to appear.

"It's written in English," Sprowle said, reading it aloud.

"TO DON JAIME PORTALA:

"Our enemies have secured the gold, and it goes on the *Stella Maris*. Thanks to Senhor Wenham who interested Montana and an American syndicate, we have raised six millions and we offer a higher royalty for the diamond fields, but the scoundrels in office have prevented our offer from reaching the president. Being in control of mails and cables, they have made it useless to attempt to communicate with you. Montana has just learned that Issoto and Grimaldi are booked on the *Stella Maris* and Wenham has been warned. The steamship company has been offered a bonus to deliver the gold before November 1. When you get this letter, go to the president and persuade him to refuse to accept it. They play into our hands by getting the steamer into Rio de Janeiro before November 1, since

it permits Wenham to reach you before the transaction is concluded. Only the president can save our country from being mulcted and only you have his ear. Beware of attempts on your life when you attempt to go to him. The palace is full of traitors.

"SORTEZ."

Sprowle looked up from the paper. "That's a rum go," he commented. "Wheels within wheels. One crowd wants this deal to go through, the other crowd tries to prevent it. Montana was on one side, Grimaldi and Issoto were on the other. That explains why Montana was killed and why they poisoned poor old Wenham."

"Yes," said Wing thoughtfully. "And it proves neither had anything to do with piracy. They wanted the gold to go through. But why did Grimaldi kill Issoto?"

"To cheat him out of his share of this business, no doubt."

"May I deliver this letter to Mrs. Wenham? It belongs to her."

"Surely. But I say—Sousa was working both with Issoto and Grimaldi. Why did he join the pirates?"

"Under orders," hazarded Wing. "I thought Grimaldi took things rather coolly. I was fool enough to consult him as to how we should save ourselves, and he gave me advice which would certainly have got me murdered."

"Look here," said Sprowle. "You were in this somehow. That's why Grimaldi wanted you killed. Well, with what we've got now, we can put the screws on Sousa and get all the facts. What's your part in this mess?"

"I'll tell you," he said impulsively. "Sortez was afraid they would get this letter away from Wenham and perhaps kill him. I am carrying a verbal message to this same Senhor Portala, just a line which was Greek to me, but which I understand now. In some manner they learned that I was in conference with Sortez, and that's why they tried to get me."

"Well," said the purser. "Appar-

ently you are on the side of honor and decency. Some crooked politicians worked the Brazilian government into a shabby deal, and the honest folks were prevented from interfering. Keep your mouth shut, get to this Portala, and between you and the letter Senhora Wenham brings him he will know what to do. The crooked crowd is all dead except Sousa, and he'll be hanged, so you ought to be safe for the remainder of the voyage."

With a swelling heart Lionel sought the cabin of Senhora Wenham and delivered to her the document which meant so much to her and her dead husband. Her gratitude was touching, and he knew that from her he would have no opposition regarding Maria. She told him so.

"WHY were you both so kind to this scoundrel Sousa?" he asked her bluntly.

"My husband was in deadly fear of Grimaldi, Sousa, and Issoto," she said. "He was warned to be extremely careful of them."

"That night on deck when he learned that a *bola* had been thrown at me, he turned pale. Did he know it was Sousa?"

"Yes. Sousa belongs to a club in Santos which practices with the *bola*, just as at American country clubs they go in for archery. He dared not betray him."

"I get you. Now I'd like to see Maria."

"She is on deck with Miss Drexel. I know she wants to see you. All my life I'll be grateful to you, Mr. Wing. May I ask one question—are you financially able to care for her?"

"I'm pretty nearly broke, but with an incentive like that you can be sure I'll manage."

"If I succeed in delivering this letter, I shall receive a large sum of money. Then Maria will have a dowry."

"I won't take it," he declared like a

characteristic American. "You'll need it yourself."

"We'll talk about that later."

Sousa, confronted with the facts in the possession of the captain and purser and subjected to a gruelling cross-questioning which lasted three hours, broke down at last and confessed everything.

As he had said, he was in the clutches of Issoto and he stood to gain nothing from the deal for the diamond fields, so it had occurred to him to get the gold. In New York he had found a wealthy bootlegger who had financed the plot, and who supplied Louis Peterson, Mott, Kregan, and the other gunmen. They had chartered a fast yacht to meet the ship near a remote island some two thousand five hundred miles southeast of New York City.

Sousa was to receive one-quarter of the gold shipment as his share, the ship was to be sunk with all on board and thus he would get rid of his master, Issoto. He had thrown the *bola* at Lionel Wing under orders, for naturally he could not inform Issoto that Wing was doomed to death anyway.

Sousa named the bootlegger who headed the conspiracy, but there was no other evidence against him as the yacht seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth and none of the other living criminals had any knowledge of the identity of their principal. Sousa's tale of joining the pirates only the night before the uprising had been sustained by the man Follen under Peterson's orders.

Issoto had sought his cabin after learning that the ship was recaptured and his gold would be delivered, and had lain down in his berth. Grimaldi, also aware that the pirate danger was over, considered the time ripe to rid himself of his partner so he had stolen into the cabin of the Jew, set up the gas apparatus beside the man's berth and slipped away. Had it not been that he set the deed down in his "Book of Doom," there would have been no sus-

picion that Issoto had not committed suicide.

BEFORE dawn next morning, the score of dead on the *Stella Maris* were committed to the sea, but the wounded pirates were carefully saved for the hangman, to be delivered over to the authorities in Rio, who would make short work of them.

The remainder of the voyage was peaceful and beautiful. Maria and Lionel and Hank and Doris sat under the Southern moon and indulged in such foolishness as happy young people in such circumstances are wont to indulge in. Doris had been persuaded to cancel her contract with the music hall for one which would last much longer, with an ex-cowboy, now a merchant of brushes. Wing, with no prospects, was happy as a man could be, for he knew what he had won.

And one fine morning the steamer entered the most beautiful harbor in the world, a bay whose water in streaks was turquoise, emerald, and amethyst, which was studded with exquisite green islands topped by gently stirring palms, and which was ringed by a gleaming white city, behind which rose light-blue mountains of bizarre and fantastic shapes—and that was Rio de Janeiro.

Captain Grigsby was pleased because he was forty-eight hours ahead of time; everybody was happy except the pirates sweltering below deck in the brig.

The ship docked, the customs formalities were attended to, and then Lionel handed Mrs. Wenham and Maria into an automobile and gave the chauffeur a certain address in Petropolis. They arrived at a large and beautiful villa in the hills and asked for Senhor Don Jaime Portala. Presently the original of the photograph which Sortez had shown Wing in New York appeared. Mrs. Wenham gave him her letter and Lionel whispered in his ear the message.

"You had no trouble reaching me?" asked the old gentleman.

Mrs. Wenham broke down then. Wing related the events of the voyage to a man who was stunned and appalled by the series of tragedies.

"All agreements made with your husband will be kept," Portala assured Mrs. Wenham, "and your thousand dollars, young man, you may have now. I think you have done Brazil a very great service."

When the syndicate offered its gold to the Brazilian government, the offer was refused, and the president of the republic forced through the more advantageous offer made by Portala and Sortez and their American syndicate.

Mrs. Wenham received fifty thousand dollars, the reward promised her husband for his good work in New York, and then she rented a lovely little villa and forced Lionel to move in with them. He did not require much urging.

About a month later he opened a letter from New York and a check dropped out. It was for twenty thousand dollars, and it came from the steamship company which owned the *Stella Maris*. In that way the company expressed its gratitude for saving the vessel and the gold shipment.

Grimaldi's estate, it appeared, had been enormous, but the fortune which he had accumulated by hideous crimes remained in chancery for a year when cousins who were in poor circumstances in Lombardy were discovered, relatives who had never benefited in the slightest degree from their relationship to a very rich man.

At the end of six weeks, Lionel Wing married Maria Wenham and Henry Gifford married Doris Drexel, then the Wings booked passage for America, with Mrs. Wenham accompanying them. Gifford, who was revolutionizing the brush trade in Rio, went down to the ship with his bride to see the other happy couple off. They did not sail on the *Stella Maris*.

THE END.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



MEET MR. MacISAAC

IN response to numerous requests for more information about himself and to put straight several readers who seem to visualize him as a writing corporation or syndicate, Fred MacIsaac takes the floor to tell us who he is and how he does it. Mr. MacIsaac:

Although my stories range over a wide extent of territory, it is not true as charged by one of your readers that I am four or five different people. I am a middle-aged person who has been engaged for more than twenty years in picturesque professions and who has a flealike propensity for travel. In twenty years it is astonishing how far one can roam and how many interesting people one can meet.

When I graduated from prep school I went to work on a Boston newspaper, and with my first five hundred dollars presented myself with a trip to Europe. In those vanished days one could travel first cabin from New York to Liverpool for seventy dollars and get a room at a good European hotel for about fifty cents a day. I lasted abroad four months on my five hundred.

For several years I worked as a ship news reporter in Boston, and during this time attended Harvard. Thus I met a lot of sea captains, college professors, literary lights and deep-sea fishermen while doubling in brass, as it were.

Music has always attracted me, and eventually I sold my services to a Boston paper as music critic, and during five interesting years consorted with opera singers and concert artists. It was a step from that to managing artists and putting on concerts and spectacles. Then I became a dramatic critic and became chummy with the big stars of the theater, most of whom are in the movies now.

My purpose in working was to get money to go places and see things, and for years I went roving during the dull months in the show business. I wandered over five continents and got into trouble in most of the ports of the Seven Seas.

About eight years ago I drifted to New York and worked as a newspaper man, dramatic critic, press agent and such, until I met Bob Davis, the celebrated editor of the Munsey publications, who told me I was an author. He is the sort of guy who won't take no for an answer, so I began to draw upon my experiences for fiction purposes. While I am not an expert in any trade nor

an authority upon any race or nation, I am a fairly sharp observer, and a few months in a strange land makes me reasonably familiar with its people and customs. I learn languages rapidly and forget them more rapidly. At various times I have been able to make myself understood in Italian, Spanish, Greek, French, and even knew a few words of Russian. Please don't check me up on this statement because I have just come from Central America and my Spanish wasn't so torrid.

Probably I would be a better writer if I concentrated upon one type of story and set my yarns in the same locale, but I wouldn't have so much fun. Besides I love to excuse myself for spending a lot of money going to some remote place by telling myself that I need the local color for a story. I don't write about places I don't know pretty well because I don't want to be shown up by your smart readers. As soon as transit is rapid and safe to the moon and the planets you may look for some swell stuff about them from me.

CIRCUS AND CARNIVAL

MOST of our readers were well pleased with John Wilstach's recent circus novelette, "Circus Blood," but here is one who takes heated exception:

Philadelphia, Pa.

I chanced to read your story, "Circus Blood," and as an old-time trouper, I want to say that your writer, John Wilstach, is out of his mind. His descriptions are all balled up, and if he ever got any nearer to a circus than I have to Mars, you will have to prove it to me. The circus and carnival of to-day is much cleaner than the average business, but your writer's cramped mind can't see it. It is true, in the old days we had some bad actors in the biz, but to-day we are as good as the average business man. Tell your writer he should get some experience with a circus. There is only one man who can write well about us people, and that is Courtney Riley Cooper. He was a circus man.

JOS. JUDGE GAYLOR.

Now it is Mr. Wilstach's turn. Knowing the author's experience as we do, it rather looks as if Mr. Gaylor jumped at conclusions. Mr. Wilstach replies:

I wonder if Mr. Gaylor has ever been with a carnival or circus? He omits to say. How-

ever, if he would like to learn a bit about the reputation of a large majority of carnivals—a prominent exception being the Jonny Jones outfit, a great and clean show—he should take a ride from Philly to Norristown, Allentown, Lansdale, Chester, or Wilmington, and ask chiefs of police and City Hall just how carnivals stack up and why they are refused licenses to give the populace the works.

Perhaps Mr. Gaylor is not aware that millions of dollars are tied up in various games that can be played, both crooked and on the level; percentage games they are called. An entire book was written about these rackets only last year and published in Philadelphia called "Bunco."

I have before me a letter from the Circus Fans Association of America. The letter-head reads: "We stand between the grafting public and the circus—and between the *grifting circus and the public*." The italics are mine. Observe this organization admits there is a grifting circus in existence. This letter, from C. G. Sturtevant, historian, says that he regards my writings very highly. Letter on request will be sent to the editor.

Years ago I traveled with the Forpaugh and Sells Brothers Circus, and with Guy Steele, and Wells Hawks was press agent of the Ringling show. Of course there are square shows, and have been. Neither Barnum & Bailey's nor Ringlings was ever criticized, since they were swept clean of camp followers. But to assert that grafting is no longer existent, nor games with a ninety-nine per cent advantage to the concession holder, is laughable. No showman goes that far. For fifteen years as a showman with legitimate attractions—"hall" shows, circus folks call 'em—I made a study of tented outfits. *Collier's* published a serial of mine on circus life, "The Main Guy," in September. It is filled with instances of grifting ways and means, but it was never criticized on that account.

Perhaps Mr. Gaylor did not notice that in my story, "Circus Blood," I paid a high tribute to the morals and ethics of the performers with the show. The grifters were, and are, hangers-on, who pay grafting executives for the privilege. I'm sorry, but this sort of thing exists in 1929—and it is simple to prove it.

THIS reader appreciates the plain type in ARGOSY as well as its fiction:

Washington, D. C.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for many years—I suppose since it was first published. I note it has quite a sale in this city, and I believe once a reader, always a reader. I am fond of all the writers, and the variety makes interesting reading. I would not suggest any change.

There is another fine feature of ARGOSY. The print is large and easy for the eyes. There are a number of so-called high priced magazines whose printing is so fine no one cares to read them, hence, I see them stay on the magazine counters in newspaper shops.

The artist who decorates the cover of ARGOSY has quite a talent. My hat off to him also. He brings out the feature in his illustration.

J. B. STRODE.

ALL right, Mr. Cooper, we'll watch out for a good eating house story for you:

San Francisco, Calif.

I can't lay claim to being brought up with ARGOSY, but I do lay a great big claim to being one of its most enthusiastic readers. In fact, I don't believe I ever read a copy up to the 3rd of January, 1926. That was the day I was careless about hiking and busted a hip. During the ten and one-half weeks of enforced convalescence I got to be a good reader. I don't think I read many serials up till about a year ago, but "that's my weakness now."

Supposing we have a good story about the eating business? We've had one about nearly everything else, from hunting to manufacturing, Western to sea, historical to flapper, and numerous others. Any one who doesn't think there is a great gob of material for a story should get a job in a restaurant, cafeteria or "hot dawg" business. Personally, I work in one of the largest cafeterias in San Francisco and have to endure the wrath of cranky customers all day long.

The inauguration of the ship on the cover of the December 29 issue sure hit's the mark.

Keep the magazine as it is. It doesn't need any tomfool changing.

NORMAN COOPER.

HEREWITH the troubles of being just a young fellow who tries to enjoy his ARGOSY in peace:

Los Angeles, Calif.

I am a boy fourteen years old, but I have read the ARGOSY for six years. My mother caught me reading your magazine soon after I began, and said she would whip me if she caught me reading such trash.

I told her to read it herself and see if it was. She read it and has not missed a magazine for the whole six years. Now I have to sneak off to the garage with the ARGOSY or else she takes it and reads it herself.

I study ancient history in school, and I like stories such as "He Rules Who Can" and "The Sword of Vengeance." I also liked "Useless," "The Golden Burden," "Thirty Years Late," "Seven Footprints to Satan" and "The Radio Planet."

FRED C. VOGEL.

A RESIDENT of Philadelphia finds W. Wirt's recent novelette all too true to life:

Philadelphia, Pa.

I've been putting off writing you to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine for twelve

years. Ray Cummings was my favorite in the old days.

Wirt's story was very good in last week's number. "More Than a Double Cross" portrays graphically conditions that now exist here in Philadelphia. The story was no sooner on the news-stands than we had a series of gang murders. Up till to-day I think the casualty list is five dead and three wounded for the week.

WM. J. STEDMAN.

IT took a German prison camp to introduce ARGOSY to this reader:

Los Angeles, Cal.

Although an American, I joined the Canadian army early in the last war and eventually was taken prisoner. While imprisoned in Germany I was given a bunch of ARGOSIES to read, and, believe me, if I read those magazines once I did it a hundred times. Could just about recite them by heart. Since that time I have never missed a single copy.

The arrangement of the ARGOSY is fine. The authors are the best in the game, and the stories are varied just right.

I have one kick, though—Westerns. "About ninety per cent of them are 'hooley.'" I have mingled with about as many "cow waddies" as the next and not three cow-punchers out of a hundred can hit a can with a six-shooter at five paces. Some classes of Westerns are O. K., but the rip-roaring, gun-toting, save-the-heroine ones are the bunk.

But just leave the good old ARGOSY as it is and then every one will be pleased.

C. L. SUTHERLAND.

WE recommend this as an excellent way to remember your favorite stories:

Wheeling, W. Va.

I have read the ARGOSY for the last eight years and have never missed a copy. Although I don't like all the stories I have no kick to make. I always read Argonotes first.

To show you how I like your writers: some three years ago my husband read a story to me while I was ill. It was written by an unknown author, "The Mark of Satan." We named our son for the hero of this story.

Mrs. M. D. KIDD.

DAD evidently changed his opinion—and now the rest of the family are not sure whether they like it or not:

Prairie View, Ill.

For some time I have been reading the ARGOSY. And now I have a "heck of a time killing time" till your next ARGOSY comes out. Dad always took our ARGOSY and burned it when we were kids, saying: "Such books aren't good for any one." Now, we stand in line or buy two books so we won't have to wait till he is through with the ARGOSY. All he needs now is a good lamp, father's chair, the ARGOSY—and

then it's: "Let me be now." All of your stories and writers are fine. "The Raider" would make an interesting and thrilling movie.

MRS. DORIS MARVEL ROLL.

IN strange and distant ports this world wanderer still finds his ARGOSY:

Harlingen, Texas.

I have been wanting to write you for thirty years. I have been a wanderer for that length of time.

Your magazine is the *best* that has ever been published; the stories are all good. The first copy I ever read I found with other loot on the march to Peking, in the Boxer Uprising. I was with Captain Jack Meyers at the gates of Peking, in the marine corps, a leatherneck. I even got my ARGOSY while with General Mosby after we took Lower California in 1908-1909; in Bocas del Toro, Costa Rica; and in Free Port, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast of Africa.

If I had a dime and had not eaten that day, I would buy the ARGOSY. I never miss one. It's like a pal that I have been with—brings back the past. I am not much of a writer, don't know how to express myself, but maybe you can understand. I know that some of your authors can.

"The Phantom in the Rainbow" is great.

A voice from anywhere,

FRANK S. NELSON.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....



Looking Ahead!

SEMI DUAL RETURNS!

One of the most unique and popular characters in detective fiction is Semi Dual, the philosopher and astrologer who brings to the solution of crime the wisdom of the ages. Next week he makes his reappearance in Argosy in

THE WOOLLY DOG

by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith

A baffling murder mystery, solved in a unique and fascinating way. Begin it next week in—*The ISSUE OF MARCH 23rd*

DIFFERENT BLOOD

A Complete Novelette

by JOHN GALLISHAW

will be another feature of this number. Mr. Gallishaw, a writer of unusual charm and talent, joins our ranks with a story of the World War—training camp life and the trenches.

COMING!

for you crime story fans

**FRANK L.
PACKARD**

with
THE BIG SHOT
May 18th

COMING!

for you Western story fans

**CHARLES
ALDEN
SELTZER**

with
MAN-HUNT
April 20th

COMING!

for you "different" story fans

**RALPH
MILNE
FARLEY**

with
The Radio Flyers
May 11th

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

"First In Fiction"

Out Every Wednesday

We have been sincerely flattered.

"Imitation is the sincerest flattery."

—C. C. COLTON, *The Lacon*.

In October, 1928, Munsey's Magazine published the first of a series of "Greatest" sports stories, entitled: "The Greatest Tennis Player of All Time," written by George Trevor.

Since that time Munsey's Magazine has printed the following stories in that series:

**The Greatest Football Player of All Time
The Greatest Football Game of All Time
The Greatest Golfer of All Time**

Another one of these articles entitled: "The Greatest Baseball Player of All Time" has been scheduled to appear in the April issue of Munsey's Magazine (on sale March 20th.)

That these stories have been of universal interest is manifested by the fact that a great many publishers have seized the idea, and are now publishing similar sports stories, in some instances taking their captions bodily from the pages of past issues of our magazine. YES, WE HAVE BEEN SINCERELY FLATTERED!

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

Get the March issue of Munsey's Magazine, now on sale at all newsdealers. It contains stories and articles by Edgar Franklin, Robert Terry Shannon, Fred Jackson, U. S. Senator Reed Smoot, and others. Also a section devoted to the Theater, and a superb article by Dorothy Dayton, entitled "Making Whoopies For Heroes."



"Lucky Strikes were the cigarettes carried
on the 'Friendship' when she crossed
the Atlantic."

Amelia M. Earhart

Amelia M. Earhart,
first woman to fly the Atlantic by aeroplane



*For a slender figure—
Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet*

"It's toasted" No Throat Irritation—No Cough.

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